

Between Islam and Byzantium

Lynn Jones

*Aght'amar
and the
Visual
Construction
of Medieval
Armenian
Rulership*



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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	vii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>A note on translation</i>	xv
1 An introduction to the historical context	1
2 Ceremonial	13
3 Bagratuni royal portraits	35
4 Artsrunik' royal portraits: the palace and the palace church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar	53
5 Royal deeds	97
6 Conclusion: methods and meanings of transmission	125
<i>Bibliography</i>	129
<i>Index</i>	141

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List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Map of Armenia	2
	Drawing by Robert H. Hewsen	
Figure 3.1	Gurgēn and Smbat Bagratuni, east façade, Church of the Holy Saviour, Sanahin	36
	<i>Source: After Eastmond, Royal Georgian Art</i>	
Figure 3.2a	Davit III and Bagrat Bagrationi, south façade, Osk Vank Cathedral	40
	<i>Source: After Eastmond, Royal Georgian Art</i>	
Figure 3.2b	Drawing, Davit III and Bagrat Bagrationi, south façade, Osk Vank Cathedral	40
	<i>Source: After Eastmond, Royal Georgian Art</i>	
Figure 3.3	Gurgēn and Smbat Bagratuni, east façade, Church of the Holy Sign, Haghbat	42
	<i>Source: After Eastmond, Royal Georgian Art</i>	
Figure 3.4	Gagik I Bagratuni, Church of St Gregory the Illuminator, Ani	44
	<i>Source: After Marr, Ani</i>	
Figure 3.5	Drawing, Ashot Kuhki, Tbilisi Museum	46
	<i>Source: After Eastmond, Royal Georgian Art</i>	
Figure 3.6a	Gagik-Abas Bagratuni with wife, Goranduxt, and daughter, Marem, Gospel of Gagik-Abas	47
	<i>Source: Jerusalem, Treasury of St James, 2556, fol. 135b</i>	
Figure 3.6b	Drawing, Gagik-Abas Bagratuni with wife, Goranduxt, and daughter, Marem	47
	Drawing by author	
Figure 4.1	General view, Aght'amar Island and the Church of the Holy Cross, Lake Van	54
	Photo by author	

Figure 4.2 Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar from the southeast Photo by author	55
Figure 4.3 West façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	56
Figure 4.4 Interior, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	58
Figure 4.5 Detail, Gagik Artsruni, east façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	59
Figure 4.6 Silver medallion of caliph al-Moqtadir <i>Source:</i> After Bahrami, 'A Gold Medal'	59
Figure 4.7 Gagik Artsruni presenting his church to Christ, west façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	60
Figure 4.8 Detail, Gagik Artsruni, west façade, church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	62
Figure 4.9 Vine scroll, west façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	63
Figure 4.10 Mosaic floor, audience hall, Khirbat al-Mafjar, Jordan <i>Source:</i> After Hamilton, <i>Walid</i>	64
Figure 4.11 View of Royal Gallery with scenes of the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	68
Figure 4.12 Orientation of lower fresco cycle, south wall, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Drawing by Rachael Freyman	69
Figure 4.13 Second Coming of Christ, south conch, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar Photo by author	69
Figure 4.14 Gold solidus, Emperor Alexander and John the Baptist, c. 912–13 Collection of Dumbarton Oaks, by permission	71

- Figure 4.15 Drawing, expulsion from Paradise, Genesis cycle,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 72
Source: After N. Thierry, 'Le Cycle de la création'
- Figure 4.16 Drawing, seraph guarding Paradise, Genesis cycle,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 72
Source: After N. Thierry, 'Le Cycle de la création'
- Figure 4.17 Drawing, God giving Adam dominion over the animals,
Genesis cycle, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 73
Source: After N. Thierry, 'Le Cycle de la création'
- Figure 4.18 Drawing, reconstruction of Genesis cycle, drum fresco,
northeast to south apse, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 74
Drawing by Rachael Freyman
- Figure 4.19 Photograph of balustrade of Royal Gallery taken in 1930s,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 75
Source: After Davies, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture*
- Figure 4.20 Drawing, reconstruction of view of Royal Gallery,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 76
Drawing by Rachael Freyman
- Figure 4.21 Gagik Artsruni, king of Vaspurakan and Adam as king in
Paradise, east façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 78
Photo by author
- Figure 4.22 Gagik Artsruni, Adam, peaceful animals, central section
of east façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 79
Photo by author
- Figure 4.23 Detail, Temptation of Eve and the Fall, central apse,
north façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 81
Source: After E. Lalayan, 'The Monastery of the Holy Cross at Agh'amar'
- Figure 4.24 East façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 83
Photo by author
- Figure 4.25 Samson and the Philistine, Ezekiel, Hezekiah and Isaiah,
eastern flank, north façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 86
Photo by author
- Figure 4.26 Eve and the Serpent; Serpent killed by St Theodore, north
façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 88
Photo by author

- Figure 4.27 Saints Theodore, Sergios and George, north façade,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 90
Photo by author
- Figure 4.28 Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace, Habakkuk and
Daniel in the Lion's Den, western flank, north façade, Church of the
Holy Cross, Aght'amar 90
Photo by author
- Figure 4.29 Jonah cycle, Abraham, Isaac and Moses, Angel, Christ
Enthroned, Archangel Gabriel, Enthroned Virgin and Child and the
Archangel Michael, western flank, south façade, Church of the Holy
Cross, Aght'amar 91
Photo by author
- Figure 4.30 Detail, Jonah and the Whale, western flank, south façade,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 92
Photo by author
- Figure 4.31 Saints Sahak and Hamazasp, eastern flank, south façade,
Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 93
Photo by author
- Figure 4.32 Saul and David, David and Goliath, eastern flank, south
façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 95
Photo by author
- Figure 5.1a Crucifixion and the Skull beneath Golgotha, Women at
the Empty Tomb, north wall, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 103
Photo by author
- Figure 5.1b Drawing, Crucifixion and the Women at the Empty Tomb,
north wall, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar 103
Source: After N. Thierry, 'Le Cycle de la création'
- Figure 5.2 Ascension, Gospel of Queen Milk'e, San Lazzaro 1144,
fol. 8 108
By permission of the Library of the Mekhitharist Fathers, San Lazzaro, Venice
- Figure 5.3 South façade, Church of the Holy Saviour, Ani 119
Photo by Daniel L. Schwartz

List of abbreviations

AB	<i>Art Bulletin</i>
AO	<i>Ars Orientalis</i>
BF	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CA	<i>Cahiers archéologiques</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
DAA	<i>Documents of Armenian Architecture</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EI ²	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> (1895–1971), 2nd edn
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HA	<i>Handēs Amsorya</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae historica</i>
RÉArm	<i>Revue des Études arméniennes</i>
RÉB	<i>Revue des Études byzantines</i>

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reminds me daily of the joys to be found in life. I dedicate this book to them both.

A note on translation

I have used a modified version of the standard Hübschmann-Meillet-Beneviste system of translation throughout this volume. Because this book is intended for an audience that is largely unschooled in the Armenian language, I have striven throughout for consistency and simplicity, and have tried to avoid translations that do violence to the English language.

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An introduction to the historical context

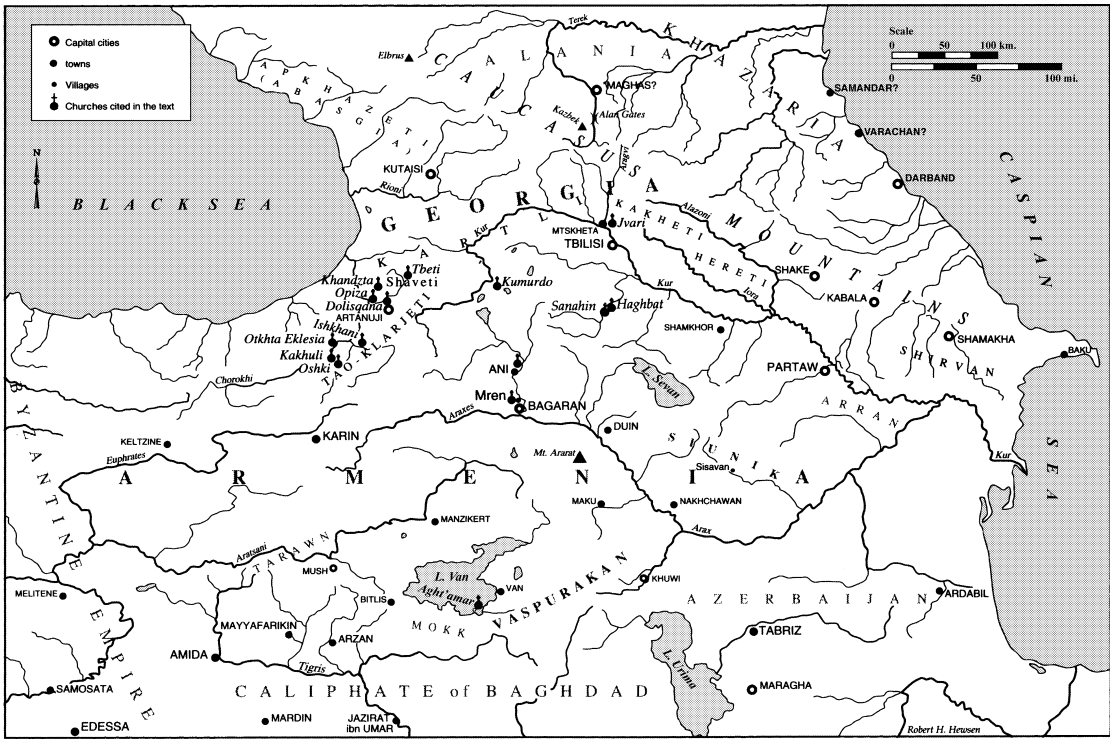
The pages that follow focus on the visual expression of rulership in Armenia during the years 884/85–1045 CE, a time commonly, if inaccurately, referred to as the Bagratuni period. It was during this time that the palace church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar and the city of Ani were built, to list only the most famous of the surviving monuments. While there is a sizeable literature on the royal art and architecture of this period, the paucity of surviving comparanda has too frequently resulted in the monuments being presented in sterile isolation, explained only internally through an analysis of their own components. There has been little attempt to interpret the message of these works through the study of their original contexts. There has also been no attempt to integrate them within the chronological scope of the period, or across the socio-political divisions that existed during those years.

What I propose is a reconstruction of the visual expression of rulership of this period through the analysis of objects and texts associated with the two most prominent Armenian families, focusing on art, ceremonial and royal deeds. There is a wealth of contemporary texts that have been edited and (mostly) translated into languages accessible to western readers. These texts have much to offer: they provide descriptions of cities, buildings and works of art that have long since disappeared. They are also rich with descriptions of ceremonial, a prominent and visual component of medieval Armenian rulership, and provide invaluable details about the diplomatic missions and gift-giving that provided some stability in a turbulent time. Through these new details, these texts grant us a new perspective on the society and the people who created the art and architecture examined in the following pages. The writings of the contemporary Armenian historians thus allow us to set those objects that remain more clearly in their original context, and to see their messages from perspectives that are closer to those who created and viewed them.

Medieval Armenia was made up of a collection of principalities ruled by *nakharars*, members of the hereditary Armenian nobility.¹ The most important families were the Bagratuni, with lands in the north, and the Artsrunik' in the south (Figure 1.1).² Regional loyalties dominated, and ideas of Armenian unity were largely conceptual – reflecting adherence to a common language or to a common Christian confession rather than to the pre-eminence of any single political entity. From the end of Arsacid rule in 428 until 884/85 there was no king of Armenia; instead it was the prince (*ishkhan*) and, in the ninth

¹ Toumanoff, 1963, pp. 115–16 n. 188, pp. 130–31 n. 229. For *nakharar* before the Arab domination of Armenia, see '*nakharar*' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix III, p. 549; Adontz, 1972, pp. 342ff.

² The Bagratuni lands stretched between the northern city of Kars and Lake Sevan, to the east, and south to the northern shores of Lake Van. The Artsrunik' lands were located to the south and east of Lake Van.



1.1 Map of Armenia

century, the presiding prince (*ishkhan ishkanats'*), who was recognized as the authority over all other Armenian princes.³ Armenia was not autonomous; during the period covered in these pages it was a vassal state of the Abbasid caliphate – the Arminya of Arabic records. The country was administered by a resident governor, or *ostikan*, appointed by the caliphate, whose principal residence was in Partaw, in modern-day Azerbaijan.⁴ The prince of Armenia was entrusted with the collection and forwarding of taxes to the *ostikan*, was prevented from minting his own coins, and was required to provide military service when necessary. Byzantium had no similar *in situ* political representative in Armenia, but nevertheless considered Armenia to be its vassal state. Accordingly, it responded in kind to each Islamic recognition of Armenian princes and nobility.

Even the term 'Armenia' is problematic; the country was only briefly

³ The title *ishkhan ishkanats'*, rendered as 'presiding prince' or 'prince of princes', appears for the first time in John Catholicos' account in reference to Bagarat Bagratuni, uncle of the future king Ashot I; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 118. For a discussion of the title of presiding prince, see Marquart, 1913/61, pp. 63-4.

⁴ The fundamental study of the Islamic administration of Armenia, and of Armenian-Islamic interactions, is Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976. For the term *ostikan*, see 'ostikan' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix III, p. 551. In the Bagratuni period, the *ostikan* was also the emir of Azerbaijan (Armenian Atrpatakan, Greek Atropatene). While the *ostikan*'s primary residence was in Partaw, the former capital of the Caucasian Albanian kings, in the tenth century the northern Armenian city of Duin served as his base within Armenia; see Manandyan, 1965, and Le Strange, 1905, 176-9. For Partaw in the pre-Bagratuni period, see Dashkuranctsi', 1961.

unified under the rule of a single king who was acknowledged by all the *nakharars*. In 884/85 Prince Ashot Bagratuni was invested by the ostikan, and as Ashot I, became Armenia's first medieval king. Ashot's successors faced formidable challenges, including the increasing strength of the ostikan's control of the country and the eastward expansion of the Byzantine empire into Armenian territory.⁵ Bagratuni rule was further undermined by civil wars that raged constantly amongst the Armenian noble houses and by *nakharars* intent on usurping Bagratuni power or on freeing themselves from Bagratuni suzerainty. In 908 Gagik Artsruni, grandson of Ashot I, established the independent southern Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan. By the second half of the tenth century rivalries within the Bagratuni family further partitioned what is generally (if confusingly) referred to as the kingdom of Armenia. While the main branch of the Bagratuni family continued to rule this northern kingdom, members of the minor branches of the family were granted possession of lands that traditionally fell under the king of Armenia's suzerainty, resulting in the establishment of several petty kingdoms, including Tarōn, Siunik', Kars and Tashir-Dzoraget.⁶

We know little of the history of the southern Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan beyond the life of the founder of the Arstruni dynasty, Gagik Artsruni. From 919 until the death of Gagik Artsruni some time after 943, Vaspurakan was the most powerful kingdom in Armenia. Gagik was the target of continuous attack by the ostikan(s), and his military prowess seems only to have increased with age. In the late 930s he joined forces with the Bagratuni king Abas, rescuing Abas from certain death with his timely arrival, and subsequently defeating the Arab armies.⁷ In 940 we find Gagik summoned to the Arab-controlled town of Khlat (modern Khilat) on the northwest shore of Lake Van, where he swore an oath of vassalage to the Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawla, who presented Gagik with 'great honours'.⁸ In the Arabic account of this meeting, Gagik is titled 'king of Armenia and Iberia'. He is given the same title in an account of a second summons which occurred the same year, where his name is given pride of place over the other attendant Armenian *nakharars* and the Bagratuni king.⁹

Gagik's authority was also recognized in Byzantium. The emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905–59), listing the forms of address given to the Armenian kings gives the title *archōn tōn archontōn* to both Abas Bagratuni and Gagik Artsruni, while addressing all other *nakharars* as *archōn*.¹⁰ The final historical reference to Gagik dates to the year 943, when a

⁵ Byzantium annexed the southwestern principality of Tarōn in 967/68, Vaspurakan in 1021, and in 1045 claimed the former Bagratuni capital of Ani, bringing to an end the rule in Armenia of the main branch of the Bagratuni family.

⁶ The internal division of the kingdom of Armenia began in 961 with the investiture of Musegh, brother of Ashot III, as king of the northwestern district of Kars. In the following decade, Ashot III's son Gurgēn was proclaimed king of the northern district of Tashir-Dzoraget, and in 982 the Bagratuni prince of Siunik' declared himself king. These events are discussed below.

⁷ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 299–301; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 362–4.

⁸ Ibn Zafir, 1934, p. 73; translated in Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 83–5.

⁹ Ibn Zafir, 1934, p. 74; translated in Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, p. 85.

¹⁰ Runciman, 1929, pp. 130–31, 249–51. For the title, see below, Chapter 2, note 41, and Chapter 3, note 11.

deposed ostikan sought refuge with Gagik on the island of Aght'amar.¹¹ It is not known when or how Gagik met his death. His son Derenik is only briefly mentioned by historians, and Vaspurakan fades from recorded history until its last king, Senek'erim, cedes the kingdom to the emperor Basil II in 1021–22 in exchange for the city of Sebastia in Cappadocia.¹²

The Bagratuni kingdom of Armenia came into ascendancy after the reign of Gagik Artsruni, but was politically weakened by division. While the fragmentation of Armenia began in 908 with the ostikan's recognition of a king of Vaspurakan, the greatest blow to unified Bagratuni rule was inflicted by Ashot III (r. 952/53–977), who began the practice of awarding royal titles to members of his extended family. While these petty kings proliferated, Armenia was also being inexorably absorbed by Byzantium. By the first quarter of the eleventh century, the rulers of Tarōn, Vaspurakan and most of Siunik' had ceded control to the Byzantine emperor, and the dispossessed rulers emigrated to Byzantine Cappadocia.¹³

In 1045 the Bagratuni king of Ani, Gagik II, was also forced by the Byzantine emperor to abdicate and move to lands in Cappadocia.¹⁴ Gagik of Kars, another member of the Bagratuni family, relinquished his northern Armenian kingdom to the emperor and moved to Tzamandos in Cappadocia in 1063.¹⁵ By 1064 the Seljuks had captured most of the Armenian territories from Byzantium, including Ani and Vaspurakan.¹⁶ The defeat of the emperor at Manzikert in 1071 effectively ended Byzantine rule in Armenia, and at the same time ended any remaining vestige of independence in the historic lands of Armenia. The new Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, officially established in 1198 but in existence since the late tenth century, carried on the tradition of Armenian independence, to be followed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the revival of Greater Armenia.¹⁷

Two contemporary historians offer much information on the early years of this period. John (Yovhannēs) Draskhanakerttsi' was the catholicos of the Armenian Church from 897/98 to 924/25. Known as John Catholicos, he wrote *The History of Armenia* to illustrate the fatal consequences of civil war to the feuding *nakharars*. He came to know his subject well. He began writing his book under the patronage of the Bagratuni kings, but was forced by civil war and the ostikan's persecution to flee south. He finished his work on the island of Aght'amar, under the protection of Gagik Artsruni.¹⁸ A second important text for this period is *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, written by Thomas [T'ovma] Artsruni, a kinsman of Gagik Artsruni and a contemporary of John Catholicos. The work was commissioned by Gagik to glorify the ancestry and accomplishments of his family. Thomas records events through

¹¹ Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 93–4.

¹² Der Nersessian, 1970, pp. 10–11.

¹³ Yuzbashian, 1973–74, pp. 139–83.

¹⁴ For Gagik II, see below, page XXX.

¹⁵ For Gagik of Kars, see below, page XXX.

¹⁶ Yuzbashian, 1973–74.

¹⁷ An overview is provided by Der Nersessian, 1970, pp. 12–14; see too Yuzbashian, 1973–74.

¹⁸ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 232. The text reflects his shift in patronage. At first critical of Gagik Artsruni, the catholicos later praises him and notes the deficiencies of Bagratuni rule.

904, when the narrative is taken up by an anonymous continuator who retells many events related previously by Thomas, and then continues the history of Gagik's reign.¹⁹

Historical context: Ninth–tenth centuries

An understanding of the nature of any visual expression of Armenian rulership is impossible without an understanding of the contemporary political situation. The defining event of this period began in 852, when the Armenian *nakharars* united against the caliph's imposition of new taxes. The caliph, al-Mutawakkil (847–861), dispatched his general Bugha to suppress the revolt. Thomas Artsruni tells us that in the course of the first campaign, the prince of Vaspurakan, Derenik Arstruni, and his son Ashot were captured by Bugha. They were bound, 'set on camels under tent-like canopies' and taken first to Azerbaijan and then to the Abbasid capital of Samarra (836–883), where they were imprisoned.²⁰ While Thomas is concerned only with the Artsrunik', almost all *nakharars*, from all prominent Armenian families, were imprisoned in Samarra. The captive Artsrunik' submitted to what Thomas Artsruni terms the 'ruinous error in being false to the orthodox and pure apostolic confession of faith'.²¹ Like the majority of the imprisoned *nakharars*, when faced with a choice to convert to Islam or die in prison, they chose apostasy.

Among the few who remained free were Smbat, the Bagratuni prince and *sparapet*, or commander-in-chief, and his eldest son Ashot. Both Thomas Artsruni and the catholicos attest to Bagratuni collaboration with Bugha, and recognize that such co-operation was essential to the preservation of Armenia.²² When Smbat *sparapet* was seized and imprisoned in 853/54, Ashot was permitted to remain in Armenia to oversee the collection and forwarding of taxes to the caliphal court.²³ He was first elevated to the title of *sparapet*; when his father died in Samarra, he was declared presiding prince and invested by the ostikan.²⁴

With much of the Artsruni nobility imprisoned, the principality of Vaspurakan was controlled by Gurgēn Apupelch Artsruni. His exploits reveal much about the prevailing political conditions in Armenia, and serve well as examples of the shifting, and to modern eyes, often startling range of alliances

¹⁹ Two further anonymous continuators take the history beyond the life of Gagik Artsruni; see the comments by Thomson in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 16–17.

²⁰ Artsruni, 1991, p. 139; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 205–6. Accompanying them in bondage was Gagik Artsruni's future regent, Gagik Apumruan. According to John Catholicos, the Artsrunik' were accompanied by their women and children. John also notes that Ashot had 'taken measures to resist' Bugha, but was turned over to him by his *nakharars*; this agrees with the information in the Artsrunik' history; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 119.

²¹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 152–3; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 219.

²² Artsruni, 1991, p. 173; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 238; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 120–21. For the term *sparapet*, see 'sparapet' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix III, pp. 560–61.

²³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 190–91; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 254–5. For Smbat's imprisonment, see Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 123.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124. Smbat's death is discussed below.

during this unstable time. Gurgēn Apupelch first allied with a renegade Bagratuni prince who had seized a Byzantine fortress near the rich silver mines of Sper in northern Armenia. According to Thomas Artsruni, Gurgēn fought the imperial army that had been sent to recapture the fortress with such valour and ferocity that the Byzantine general described his worthy foe in letters to the emperor. The emperor, Michael III (842–867), was so impressed that he invited Gurgēn to Constantinople, hoping to enlist his services. While Gurgēn declined, he did convince his fellow Armenians to return the contested fortress to Byzantine control.²⁵ Gurgēn then presented himself in service to the Bagratid *sparapet* Smbat. The *sparapet* sent news to Bugha, praising Gurgēn's military exploits against the Byzantines: 'May you be pleased, valiant general, with his brave deeds against the Greek army.'²⁶ Bugha was indeed pleased, and allowed Gurgēn to remain with Smbat, free from the threat of Arab reprisals.

During this seminal period, historically referred to as the time of captivity, there were many *azats*, or lesser nobility, of Vaspurakan who remained free. Seeking to increase their territorial holdings, many raided adjacent lands, including those that Bugha had previously granted to the Bagratuni. In response, the general sent Arab troops to battle the *azats*, who suffered heavy losses until the arrival of Gurgēn Apupelch, who had received permission from the Bagratuni *sparapet* to join the battle, siding with the *azats* – even though the lands in dispute were recognized as Bagratuni lands. After Gurgēn's arrival, the *azats* rallied, and with his help they 'removed all the tribes of Muslims who were living' in Vaspurakan.²⁷ Bugha next sent an army against Gurgēn that was composed of troops from an Arab emirate and 'those of the nobility of Vaspurakan who had joined the royal [caliphal] army'.²⁸ This force was also thoroughly routed by Gurgēn's troops. Bugha rather belatedly recognized Gurgēn's skills and in 854 raised him to the rank of prince and general in his own army, 'to be trusted in his [Bugha's] own stead'.²⁹

In sum, within a span of two years Gurgēn Apupelch Artsruni had allied with a renegade Bagratuni prince against Byzantine forces and then convinced that prince to make concessions to the Byzantines. He vowed allegiance to the Bagratuni *sparapet*, an Armenian in the service of Bugha. The Bagratuni *sparapet* then allowed Gurgēn to join in battle with the lesser Artsrunik' nobility against the caliphate – in order to repossess Artsrunik' lands that had been granted to the Bagratuni. When Bugha's armies, composed at least in part of Armenians from Vaspurakan, failed to defeat him, Gurgēn's military prowess was recognized and rewarded by Bugha with a powerful post in the caliphal army. This is just one of many biographies from the period that present a modern reader with nearly incomprehensible complexity.

²⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 194; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 258–59.

²⁶ Artsruni, 1991, p. 195; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 259.

²⁷ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 196–97; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 259–60, although Thomas later states that despite Gurgēn's efforts, 'the land was not secure'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 202; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 266.

²⁸ Artsruni, 1991, p. 197; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 261.

²⁹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 198; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 262.

Arab–Armenian interactions were not always hostile. Members of the Zurarid emirate in particular intermarried with both the Bagratuni and Artsrunik' families in alliances that pre-dated the insurrection of 852. Musa bin Zurara fought with Bugha against the Bagratuni in Tarōn, but was also married to the sister of Bagarat Bagratuni, prince of Tarōn.³⁰ Musa's son, known in the Armenian texts as Aplmaxr, married an Artsrunik' princess, creating an alliance that allowed him to claim Artsrunik' aid in his territorial struggles against a rival emir.³¹ In turn, the Artsrunik' princes were able to call upon Aplmaxr for aid in eliminating their Bagratuni-imposed regent. According to John Catholicos, Aplmaxr also secretly converted to Christianity.³²

The relationship between the Bagratuni and the ostikans was much less cordial. While Ashot I ruled as presiding prince (862–884/85), the Bagratuni and their vassal lords were required to provide military aid to the ostikan. Subsequent events illustrate the continually shifting balance of power between the ostikan and the Bagratuni during this period. When the would-be usurper Yamanik was unsuccessful in his siege of Partaw, he turned to the caliph for official recognition as ostikan. The *nakharars*, led by Ashot, communicated their opposition against Yamanik to the caliph, who followed their wishes and appointed another candidate. When this new ostikan turned on Ashot he was captured by the combined Armenian forces, acting under Ashot's command, and physically expelled from Armenia.³³

In 884/85 Ashot was recognized as king of Armenia. The ostikanate of Arminya was then allowed to lapse, and of the former duties exacted of Armenian nobility, only the collection of caliphal taxes remained in place. The main focus of Bagratuni–Arab tension now shifted to the traditional Bagratuni capital of Duin, which was also a major trade centre and home to the Catholicos of Armenia. While he was still presiding prince, Ashot had expelled the ostikan from the city. Duin remained under Bagratuni control throughout Ashot's reign, but after becoming king, he transferred his capital to the city of Bagaran. When Ashot I died in 890, his son Smbat found his right to succeed contested by his uncle, and during the struggle for succession, Duin came under the control of two Arab brothers. Smbat attacked the city and seized the fleeing rebels. After reclaiming the city, he sent the captured brothers in chains to the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (886–912).³⁴ Smbat had little time to savour his victory, for within the next year, 893/94, Duin was struck by an earthquake that destroyed most of the city, including the catholicos' palace and the cathedral. The catholicos relocated to the Bagratuni-controlled city of Vagharshapat (modern-day Echmiadzin).³⁵ Duin remained

³⁰ Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 42–3, 55–6; Artsruni, 1991, 108–10; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 175–7.

³¹ Abu'l-Maghra, also known as Abu'l-Muizz; Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 48, 56.

³² Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 145.

³³ For Yamanik (in Arabic, Muhammad al-Yamani) and the new ostikan, Ahmet' (in Arabic, Ahmad b. Khalid), see Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 57–60; Artsruni, 1991, 218–19; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 282.

³⁴ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 137–9. The Bagratuni–Byzantine connection is discussed at length below.

³⁵ For the earthquake, see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 139–40; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 230–31; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 293–4.

in the ostikan's hands, and was used as a military base in his later battles against Smbat.

Early in Smbat I's reign as king, the ostikanate of Arminya was re-established and joined with that of Azerbaijan.³⁶ This reinstatement of the ostikan to a position of direct control over Armenia had dire consequences for Bagratuni rule, consequences that laid the foundations for the rise of Gagik Artsruni. Bagratuni kings and *nakharars* were again required to provide the ostikan with military aid, an obligation that had been in abeyance during Ashot I's rule. The Sadjid ostikans were eager to foster mistrust amongst the *nakharars*, seeking to destabilize Bagratuni rule and to usurp the Bagratuni king's right to send taxes to the caliph.³⁷ It is this political development that led to the investiture of Gagik Artsruni as king of Vaspurakan, and to the death of his uncle and former suzerain, Smbat I. These events will be examined in the following chapters.

Good rulership

Given the realities of Islamic and Byzantine aggressions, continual civil wars and an ever-changing kaleidoscope of internal and international alliances, what were the expectations to which an Armenian ruler was held? What defined good rulership? Chapters 3–5 examine the limited artistic evidence. The remainder of this chapter and Chapter 2 detail the answers found in the contemporary texts.

Thomas Artsruni repeatedly notes that a prince's foremost duties are the establishment of prosperity in the land and the care of the Armenian people. He ascribes a proper concern for this duty to both Bagratuni and Artsrunik' rulers. Thomas quotes approvingly a letter Ashot I wrote to the ostikan complaining of oppressive taxation: 'It is the duty of kings who govern the world to watch over and care for the prosperity of the country, to lighten the tyrannous yoke of heavy burdens and soften the severity of painful demands for taxes, lest the productive capacity of the country be completely destroyed.' Ashot argues that kings should arrange their internal policies to ensure 'that the land may be prosperous and peaceful and royal [that is, caliphal] taxes come in regularly.'³⁸

According to Thomas, when Gagik and Gurgēn Artsruni shared the rule of Vaspurakan, their reign was a paradigm of harmonious co-operation: 'By their reforms they restored to order what had been disturbed, brought back those who had been deprived of or removed from their ancestral lands and homes, settled the confused and turbulent state of the county into a course of calm and peace, and permitted each and every inhabitant of the country to

³⁶ Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, p. 60.

³⁷ For Afshin (Arabic, Afshin b. Abu'l-Sadj), ostikan of the Sadjid dynasty, see Artsruni, 1991, pp. 233–4; translated in Artsruni, 1985, 296–7. For the Sadjid ostikans in general, see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. Sadjids, no. 2.

³⁸ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 117–18; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 183–4.

live in security, undisturbed by marauders within or without.³⁹ This motivation – a concern for their people – is repeatedly stressed by Thomas: ‘So they began to create prosperity and peace for the land through equitable justice, care for orphans and widows, vigilance in charity for the poor and embellishment of the church.’⁴⁰ After Gurgēn’s death, Thomas praises Gagik in the same terms, noting that he ‘was unstintingly mindful of all necessities, and accomplished everything that might serve the prosperity and peace of the land, involving himself in every useful activity’.⁴¹

Thomas takes care to note that Gagik is not solely concerned with the material well-being of his subjects, but that he is also a valiant defender of the Christian faith: ‘he was also ready to shed his blood and virtuously lay down his life for his sheep, like a good shepherd’.⁴² Of Derenik Artsruni, Gagik’s father, Thomas notes: ‘Derenik daily increased and improved the prosperity and peace of the country, building, maintaining, administering. In his days there was a respite from brigands and marauders across the land; the rites of the holy church of Christ were splendidly and properly performed; there was no fear or suspicion anywhere.’⁴³ Thomas contrasts Gagik’s selfless interest in fulfilling his princely duties with a more corrupted example of Armenian rulership. He describes a *nakharar* who plotted against the Artsrunik’: ‘His eyes on the desire for ambition – the gathering of troops, the forming of cavalry, the giving of gifts to magnates and lords of the land, the summoning of everyone to support and aid.’⁴⁴ By stressing that this man wished only for personal power and glory, Thomas effectively contrasts his vainglorious ambitions against the stable and sober rule of the Artsruni princes.⁴⁵

The catholicos was possessed of a weary pragmatism, and recognized that the Armenian Church could not survive if the country was constantly at war. Throughout his text, he urges that the first duty of Armenian princes involves the fulfilment of the secular obligations to the caliphate. Of Gagik’s submission to the ostikan’s taxation he says: ‘He [Gagik] acted accordingly for many years, so that the holy foundations of the Church remained undisturbed. Prosperity, peace, and renovation as well as security prevailed naturally over the land. Abundance and fertility were granted by the grace of God, and in this way they lived in their homes, as if in a peaceful haven.’⁴⁶

³⁹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 251; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 313–14.

⁴⁰ Artsruni, 1991, p. 252; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 315.

⁴¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 254; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 316–17.

⁴² Artsruni, 1991, p. 254; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 317.

⁴³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 217–18; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 281.

⁴⁴ Artsruni, 1991, p. 223; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 286–7.

⁴⁵ Thomas makes scarce mention of Ashot, Gagik’s elder brother; undoubtedly Ashot’s excommunication and subsequent death made any reference to him in the official panegyric of the Artsrunik’ family exceedingly problematic. For a discussion of the different accounts of Ashot’s death in the *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, see below, p.65 n. 27. Thomas does praise Ashot’s military prowess, but does not attribute any of his deeds to his role as a prince of Vaspurakan. The anonymous continuator goes further, and almost succeeds in eradicating Ashot from his history in his goal of praising Gagik. For example, upon the death of Derenik Artsruni, the continuator first acknowledges that ‘his eldest son Ashot was confirmed on his father’s throne at the age of about twelve years’. He then states that Derenik’s widow took heart in the midst of her grief, seeing her young son Gagik, who ‘shone out with wonderful éclat among his brothers’. Gagik, he continues, then ‘ruled his principality like a man with the help of her father Ashot, king of Armenia’; Artsruni, 1991, p. 269; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 332.

⁴⁶ Draskhanakerttsi’, 1987, p. 217.

The catholicos frequently singles out rulers who have worked for the establishment of peace and prosperity. John extols the rule of Ashot I, emphasizing his ability to bring order to the ravaged country, thus increasing the prosperity of Armenia: 'Banishing from their midst brigandage and murder he turned all of them into obedient, law-abiding people.'⁴⁷ Such peace could only be achieved by the strict observation of the hierarchy of Armenian power; the catholicos notes repeatedly that the *nakharars* should observe the sovereignty of the Bagratid king, obeying his judgments and following his example. John singles out for particular praise those *nakharars* who remain within their own lands, tending to the needs of their own people without attempting to enlarge their territory. He praises, for instance, Vasak, a prince of Tarōn, for yielding more consistently to Ashot I than did Derenik Artsruni: 'and heeding his words of advice with care, kept them in his mind as precepts, whereby he brought a greater degree of prosperity on his domain and lived in peace in accordance with all the manifestations of piety'.⁴⁸ He notes approvingly that the prince of Vaspurakan was able to bring prosperity to his land because he was willing to accept the guidance of Ashot I: 'He [Derenik] busied himself peacefully with building and made his ancestral domain a safe place, secure from all plundering troops, in which to live.' When, however, Derenik ceased to value the advice of his royal father-in-law, John states that 'he could not achieve his former success'.⁴⁹

Describing a peaceful interlude in 907, John writes: 'in those days, the Lord came down to the land of the Armenians. He protected everyone, and granted them success in all their undertakings. Each one lived in his own patrimony, and taking possession of the land that was his own, cultivated the vineyards and built orchards of olive and fruit trees.' The *nakharars*, he continues, were then able to erect 'churches built with solid stones that were cemented with lime mortar', and he notes with favour particular princes who surpassed the others in their church-building.⁵⁰

John consistently praises those rulers who find peaceful ways of negotiating their disputes. Praising Gagik Artsruni, he writes: 'Thus, the incursions of the enemy were stopped, and the domain of king Gagik enjoyed a life of peace and tranquility, safe from the attacks of outsiders.'⁵¹ His praise of Gagik increases in the latter part of his book, and while this no doubt reflects the move of the catholicos to Aght'amar, it is also consistent with his earlier diatribes against civil strife: 'At this time, king Gagik, having come to his sense by his own clear thinking, made the impossible possible and devoted the rest of his life to the benefit of the people. For he strove heartily to keep himself away from wickedness, emulate closely his creator and according to the apostolic precept, "if possible, so far as it lies [with you], live at peace with all men".'⁵² John emphasizes that Gagik achieved this relative peace by co-

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 128–9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 213.

⁵² Ibid., p. 217.

operating with the caliphate, 'though against his will': 'danger had taught him how to save himself and assist many others'.⁵³

The catholicos was no meek cleric; he acknowledges the need for military force against those who will not follow the lawful order. Of Gagik, he notes approvingly that 'against those who were stubborn, wicked and hostile to peace, he waged destructive war, and fell upon them with great forces until he had brought them to submission'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, he reserves particular condemnation for those *nakharars* who are unwilling to resolve disputes by any other means. Following the death of Smbat I, it is apparent that the catholicos increasingly despairs of Ashot II's desire for a peaceful resolution of his dispute with his cousin the anti-king. After Ashot II had plundered the lands of his rival, the catholicos 'with bitter tears uttered many scolding words and expressed my utter disgust at the son of king Smbat'.⁵⁵ While the disputants frequently agree to the terms of peace arranged by the catholicos, John notes that they 'did not abide by their noble promises'.⁵⁶

There was little the catholicos could do to rein in the warring claimants to royal office; while he may have threatened both of them with excommunication, he was apparently unwilling to actually pronounce such an anathema upon a future Bagratuni king of Armenia.⁵⁷ After Ashot II was formally invested as king in 916, he still refused to obey the catholicos' advice, and John's criticism of him becomes increasingly severe. He now expresses the opinion that Ashot II's warlike behaviour is bringing about God's disfavour, resulting in the defeat of his army: 'However, Ashot the son of king Smbat, putting his hopes in the strength of his forces, and his own valour, boasted arrogantly and haughtily, whereat the Lord was perhaps displeased'.⁵⁸ The catholicos makes it abundantly clear that while it is the duty of the *nakharars* to obey the king of Armenia, that king must obey the catholicos.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 205.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 208; Ashot II breaks his previous promise not to imprison a rival: 'Although I admonished the king in very caustic terms and upbraided him greatly for breaking his oath ...'.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 205.

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Ceremonial

Ceremonial and texts

Despite the political fragmentation of medieval Armenia, the Bagratuni successfully maintained the monarchy, ruling from 884 to 1045. Contemporary texts make clear that one of the most important expressions of Bagratuni royal status was the ceremonial bestowal or confirmation of legitimate power. Textual descriptions of ceremonies accorded to and by Bagratuni kings reveal much about the medieval Armenian concept of rulership. The ceremonies also provide important comparanda for other expressions of royal power, such as portraits, of which there are few surviving examples. This chapter examines the evolution of Bagratuni ceremonial and its influence on that used in Vaspurakan, tracing both the influence of Abbasid ceremonial and the development of a distinctly Armenian confirmation of rulership.

The Islamic ceremonial paradigm

The writings of Thomas Artsruni and John Catholicos are replete with descriptions of ceremonies in which the caliphate grants honours and titles to *nakharars*. The earliest ninth-century ceremony for which there exists a contemporary, detailed description involves Gurgēn Artsruni. In 851/52, after several years of armed resistance, Gurgēn was persuaded by Bugha to accept investiture as prince of Vaspurakan. According to Thomas Artsruni, Gurgēn travelled to Bugha's camp accompanied by his army. There, with standards flying and flags rippling in the breeze, Bugha placed a 'princely crown on his head and royal garments on his person, girded him with a sword, and set him on a finely adorned mule'.¹ Gurgēn was then escorted from the camp by an Islamic military escort, armed and wearing full uniform. The sound of drums and trumpets filled the air, a herald proclaimed his lands and title, and axe-bearers stood guard, ready to push aside 'the pressing throng'.²

A comparison of Gurgēn's ceremony with those accorded to other *nakharars* in the same decade reveals just how unique were the honours granted to Gurgēn. His is the only recorded investiture of an Armenian prince that includes the bestowal of a crown. Indeed, the only other contemporary

¹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 149–50; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 216.

² *Ibid.*

ceremony equal to Gurgēn's in splendour is one at which the caliph officiated, and which is discussed below.³ Bugha's motivation for providing such lavish honours is, I suggest, revealed in Gurgēn's subsequent fate: three days after his investiture, he was seized and sent into captivity. The extraordinary distinctions extended by Bugha thus seem intended as bait to lure Gurgēn and ensure his capture.

The writings of John Catholicos support this conclusion. One year after Gurgēn's imprisonment, Bugha used a similar ruse to capture the *sparapet* Smbat Bagratuni, father of the future Bagratid king Ashot I. Bugha promised Smbat that if he went to Samarra, the caliph would grant him control over Armenia and give him 'royal gifts and honours' before sending him back to his lands. Smbat accompanied Bugha to the royal court and appeared before the caliph, but rather than being singled out for ceremonial recognition, he was 'ranked along with the rest' of the captive *nakharars* and imprisoned.⁴

With Gurgēn Artsruni in Samarra, the foremost of the Artsruni *nakharars* not imprisoned was Gurgēn Apupelch, whose history we now re-join. In 854 Bugha formally granted Gurgēn Apupelch dominion over Vaspurakan, recognizing him as both prince and general. According to Thomas Artsruni, Bugha was not present for the ceremony, but sent a representative to officiate in his name. Gurgēn Apupelch was presented with a princely sword and belt and with rods emblematic of his authority as general. He was also given a 'spirited horse that stamped its foot imperiously, ideal for riding to war'.⁵

In 858 the imprisoned *nakharars* were released from Samarra after vowing to aid al-Mutawakkil against a perceived Byzantine threat. Because many of the Armenians had died in captivity, there was an official re-apportionment of lands and titles in a ceremonial that also served to reaffirm the caliphate's suzerainty. Thomas Artsruni describes the honours afforded to Derenik and Ashot Artsruni, his patron's father and grandfather. They were brought before the caliph, who personally 'clothed them with garments, set [in their hands] a princely banner, girded them with a sword and belt adorned with precious stones, and [gave them] a select and richly ornamented horse'. They were then sent from the hall 'in glorious splendour and notable honour to the sound of singing and the blowing of trumpets', while heralds 'with voices loud and clear' declared their new titles.⁶ While Thomas is concerned only with the Artsruni, he does note that before the ceremony the caliph first entertained all the *nakharars* in his banqueting hall 'and promised to restore to each one his lands in inheritance'.⁷ This suggests that the ceremonial recognition which followed was not restricted to the Artsruni princes but was accorded to all those who were to be released.

³ This ceremony occurred in 858, and is discussed below.

⁴ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 123–4. Laurent, 1922, pp. 156–88, notes that Bugha frequently resorted to such tactics.

⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 198, translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 262. Gurgēn's remarkable career is analysed by Laurent, 1922, see esp. p. 174 for his investiture.

⁶ Artsruni, 1991, p. 202; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 265–6. Only one horse was presented because only the younger prince Derenik, who was still a minor, was actually allowed to return to Armenia; his father Ashot was released several years later. Such details inspire confidence in Thomas's account.

⁷ Artsruni, 1991, p. 202; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 265; emphasis added.

John Catholicos' brief description of the elevation of the Bagratuni *sparapet* Ashot (later Ashot I) to the status of presiding prince parallels the descriptions of ceremonies discussed above. According to the catholicos the ostikan came to Armenia in 862 'in accordance with the orders of the caliph' and invested Ashot 'with many robes as well as royal insignia'.⁸ The catholicos confirms the *de facto* royal status granted by this highest of ranks, observing that after Ashot's appointment all the *nakharars* aspired to marry into the Bagratuni house in order to 'be distinguished from the other *nakharars* houses as members of the royal family'.⁹

The shared features of these and other ceremonial recognitions of *nakharars*, as reported by the contemporary Armenian historians, indicate that the caliphate employed a standard ceremony.¹⁰ This ceremony was not restricted to Armenia. In 857/58 Bugha attacked Albania, where, according to Thomas Artsruni, his army was defeated 28 times by Albanian forces under the command of Prince Esayi Apumuse. When Bugha refused to admit defeat, letters were sent to the caliph requesting aid in ending the conflict. The caliph's reply guaranteed Apumuse a pardon for the damages sustained by the royal army, and also promised 'honourable and expensive garments with a decorated helmet and sword' if he would submit peacefully to Bugha and then present himself before the caliph. On his way to Bugha's camp, Apumuse was met by companies of the royal army bearing gifts of armaments and richly adorned horses. Apumuse was then escorted to the general's camp by a procession of musicians and singers. He was graciously entertained by his former adversary, presented with honours and 'gifts in accordance with the caliph's orders', and then escorted to Samarra by members of Bugha's cavalry.¹¹

As described in the surviving texts, each of these ceremonies featured investment with robes, the presentation of swords, belts or other symbols of rank, and frequently also included the gift of a horse or mule. The more lavish also featured heralds to proclaim lands and titles, and musicians to accompany the public presentation of the honoree. Although standardized, the ceremony was extremely flexible and could be adapted to suit varied requirements.¹² The setting could be outside, in the military camp of an Islamic commander or of the ostikan, or it could be held in a formal

⁸ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 125. In 856 Ashot had acceded to the title of *sparapet*. As noted above, this title had been previously held by Ashot's father Smbat, who died in Samarra. Artsruni, 1991, p. 191; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 255, indicates that Ashot, who was not imprisoned but was allowed to remain in Armenia to oversee the Bagratid lands, was appointed to his new rank by Bugha, but he does not provide details of the ceremony. Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 125, notes only that Ashot, upon his elevation, was 'given greater recognition than almost all of his predecessors', due to his honour and ability to refrain from war.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰ For the ostikan Yusuf's later, unsuccessful attempt to honour Gurgēn and Davit Gnunik' with the same ceremony, see the historian Step'annos [Stephen] of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 20. Stephen, writing in 966–88, is also known as Asoghik, or 'the storyteller'. Thomas Artsruni notes that Apumuse was among those imprisoned in Samarra with the Armenian princes; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 177–85, 190–91; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 241–9, 255. For Esayi Apumuse, see Laurent, 1980, pp. 143, 380–81; Daskhuranttsi', 1961, vol. III, p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² For the systemization of ceremonial by the Abbasid caliphate, see Al-Azmeh, 1997, pp. 134–5.

ceremonial space, such as the caliphal banqueting hall. The caliph could officiate, or the honours could be accorded by his representatives – but of course, the higher the rank of the presiding official, the greater the honour to the recipient.¹³ While suitable for honouring one person, Thomas Artsruni's account of the ceremony in Samarra in 858 suggests that it could also be expanded into a grand production capable of processing many honorees.

The evolution of Bagratuni ceremonial: 884–928

Ashot I ruled as presiding prince for twenty-two years before he was elevated to royal status in 884. This extraordinary length of time underscores the difficulties in restoring a monarchy to tenth-century Armenia. There was no clearly established precedent for the internal election or appointment of an Armenian king.¹⁴ Historically, Armenian kingship was designated and supported by the controlling foreign power, and unless removed, succession was hereditary within a designated royal family. The Bagratuni had served as coronants (*t'agadir*) to the Parthian Arsacid kings who ruled from the first to the mid-fifth century; in the ninth century, Ashot I could not therefore lay historic claim to royal status.¹⁵ The Bagratuni were also hampered by their poor pious reputation, a fact which necessitates a brief historical digression.

The Bagratuni began their rise to power in the period following the end of Arsacid rule in 428, when Armenia was divided between the Sasanian and Byzantine empires. This period, which lasted until the Arab invasions of the 640s, is known as the *marzpanate*, from the title *marzpan* given to the Sasanian governor of Armenia. During this time, the Bagratuni also established an enduring rivalry with the Mamikonian, the pre-eminent Armenian princely family.¹⁶ The Mamikonian were pro-Western, forming alliances first with Rome and then with Byzantium; the Bagratuni pursued alliances with the Sasanian kings. While the Bagratuni's pro-Eastern policy compromised to some small degree their pious reputation, the most serious damage to their pious persona resulted from their support of the traitor Vasak Siwni in the Armenian rebellions of 450–51. This period of Armenian resistance to the Sasanian imposition of Zoroastrianism culminated in 451 at the battle of Avarayr, when the Bagratuni joined with Vasak Siwni and the Sasanian army

¹³ See, for example, the investiture of Gagik Artsruni by the caliph, discussed below, to which the Artsruni historian gives much greater attention than Gagik's previous two investitures by the ostikan.

¹⁴ The *nakharars* did infrequently petition the controlling power for the installation of a particular candidate from the acknowledged royal or pre-eminent family, and often used the catholicos as their intermediary. For examples in the Arsacid period and for evidence of the continuation of this process into the Arab period, see Khorenats'i, 1978, pp. 257–8, 295; Artsruni, 1991, p. 79; translation in Artsruni, 1985, p. 145; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 82, 86, 104, 105; Thomson, 1989, pp. 168–9.

¹⁵ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 73; [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, pp. 228–9, 563; Toumanoff, 1963, p. 139; Perikhanian, 1967, p. 18. The royal families of classical Armenia were most often collateral branches of the suzerain dynasty; the Bagratuni were, strictly speaking, the first Armenian kings; Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 233–81.

¹⁶ For the Mamikonian, see Khorenats'i, 1978, pp. 357–68; [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix I, pp. 385–6; Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 209–11.

and defeated the Armenians and their commander, Vardan Mamikonian.¹⁷ Vardan's death on the battlefield granted him martyr's status and boosted the pious authority of the Mamikonian.

Following the Arab invasions of Armenia in the mid seventh century, the Bagratuni ensured their continued rise by transferring their loyalties from the Sasanian rulers to their new overlords. Yet their failure to produce a martyr during the Armenian revolts against Umayyad rule meant that their piety continued to suffer in comparison to the piety of other princely houses.¹⁸ It was not until the advent of the Abbasid caliphate in 750 and the subsequent Armenian rebellions that the Bagratuni could finally claim a martyr. The redemption of their pious prestige began in 774–75 at the battle of Bagrevand. The Armenian forces were decimated by the Abbasid army, and the death of the commanders Mushegh Mamikonian and Smbat Bagratuni on the field of battle granted them immediate martyr's status.¹⁹ So destructive was this battle to the *nakharars* that in its aftermath, many of the previously dominant dynasties, including the Mamikonian, never regained their stature. The Bagratuni's survival and recovery was facilitated by their established pro-Arab policy and the refuge provided by their lands, safely distant, in the northern districts of Sper and Tayk'.

By the ninth century, the Bagratuni's continued loyalty to the caliphate allowed them to become the most powerful of the *nakharars*. Bagratuni control of the silver mines of Sper was instrumental in increasing and consolidating their power, as the wealth generated by the mines allowed them to acquire territory from the declining princely houses. The ninth century also witnessed the continued redemption of their pious reputation. As we have seen, in 861 the general Bugha imprisoned Smbat Bagratuni, *sparapet* and father of the future Ashot I. While the other *nakharars* imprisoned at Samarra chose apostasy and the promise of freedom over death, Smbat refused to renounce his faith and died in captivity in 862. His steadfastness, almost unique among the captive Armenians, gained him the appellation 'the Confessor' and granted his family an aura of piety at a time of great national shame.²⁰ With Smbat's martyrdom, the pious reputation of the Bagratids was, for the first time, on an even par with their acknowledged secular power.

With this understanding of the Bagratuni's pious history, we can now

¹⁷ For Bagratuni support of the traitor Vasak Siwni against Mamikonian rule, see Eghishē, 1982, pp. 144, 281. Garsoïan suggests that this treachery and the resultant disgrace of the Bagratuni in the second half of the fifth century is reflected in their absence from the writings of [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand; see 'Bagratuni' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix I, pp. 362–3. For Bagratuni-Mamikonian rivalry in the sixth–seventh centuries, see Grousset, 1973, pp. 318–19.

¹⁸ In 705 the Umayyad suppression of an Armenian rebellion resulted in the majority of *nakharars* being burned alive in a church at Nakhchavan; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 108–9. Smbat Bagratuni, senior member of the family, had taken refuge in Byzantine-held Tayk' and thus escaped the flames. When he returned to Armenia in 709, the caliph appointed him prince (*ishkhan*) of Armenia. His return and elevation is not mentioned by the catholicos; with his next appearance in the narrative, Smbat is called 'the great Sparapet of Armenia'; *ibid.*, p. 117; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 105, 252; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 170–71, 314.

¹⁹ Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 348–50; Grousset, 1973, pp. 312–22; Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, p. 21.

²⁰ Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 120, 122–5. The Confessor is notably absent from Thomas Artsruni's account, which does include a lengthy description of the apostasy of the *nakharars* and focuses on Bagratuni apostasy in particular; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 158–9, 162–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 223–4, 228–31.

return to the ninth century ceremonial. According to John Catholicos, the decision to grant Ashot Bagratuni the royal title in 884/85 was made by the *nakharars* rather than by the caliph or ostikan: 'In view of the nobility of his family, the princes and *nakharars* of Armenia unanimously resolved to raise him up as king over themselves, and informed the caliph through the governor.'²¹ The caliph demonstrated his agreement by sending the ostikan to Armenia with 'a royal crown' which was formally presented to Ashot together with robes, horses, weapons, and ornaments.²² Only the gift of a crown differentiates this ceremony from those which elevated Armenian nobles to lesser rank, confirming that the first recognition of the Bagratuni king was effected in an Abbasid ceremony. Ashot's royal status was then again acknowledged in a second, Armenian ceremony, in which the catholicos George II blessed the new king and placed a crown upon his head.²³

When Ashot I died in 890, the succession of his eldest son, Smbat I, was contested by Ashot's brother Abas. John Catholicos tells us that Artnerseh II, the prince of Iberia, rallied Smbat to the defence of his throne. He forced Smbat 'to divest himself of his mourning attire and to put on the royal robes'.²⁴ This suggests the existence of a repository of Bagratid regalia that were recognized as symbols of the *de facto* power of the king; the absence of any mention of a crown suggests that it was restricted to the formal investiture ceremony.²⁵ Smbat and Abas fought a brief war before agreeing to the terms of peace negotiated by the catholicos; only then was Smbat formally invested in the same double ceremony that had been accorded to his father. First the ostikan 'came forth to meet him at the place of assembly' and presented Smbat with 'a royal diadem' and 'robes wrought with gold' as well as horses and armour.²⁶ The king and his court then went to the cathedral with the catholicos, who 'pronounced the solemn blessings' on Smbat, invested him with 'gold-embroidered robes covered with expressive designs', and placed a royal crown on his head.²⁷

The textual accounts of the investitures of the first two Bagratuni kings of Armenia clearly indicate the separate nature of the Abbasid and Armenian ceremonies. They not only featured different participants, they occurred in different settings and followed different procedures. In each, the ostikan first ceremonially presented the new king with a crown, luxurious robes and other sumptuous gifts in the presence of the assembled Armenian and Abbasid armies. The king was then invested a second time in a ceremony performed by

²¹ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 128.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁵ The catholicos later confirms the existence of a Bagratid royal treasury in his description of his diplomatic journey to Partaw in 908. He went loaded with gifts for the ostikan, which, he remarks, came from the 'royal treasuries'; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 163. For princely insignia granted to Armenian rulers by the imperial court during the *marzpanate*, see Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 134-5, nn. 233-5. Ukhtanēs, the bishop of Sebastia, writing in the last decade of the tenth century, indicates that the treasury of the Armenian patriarchate preserved the regalia of kings from the pre-Arab period. He claims to have seen the 'precious vestment' of Trdat the Great which was given to the Church c. 607 as a 'gift for sacred use'. There is no indication of this garment's continued *royal* use; Ukhtanēs, 1988, pp. 85, 152 n. 38.1.

²⁶ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 132.

²⁷ Ibid.

the catholicos in the major church of the current Bagratid capital.²⁸ The catholicos blessed each king, placed a crown on his head, and sometimes also invested him with royal robes.

It may be suggested that the double investitures accorded to Ashot I and Smbat I confirmed and displayed different aspects of Armenian kingship. In Abbasid ceremonial, the crown was reserved for military recognition of victorious commanders, and was deemed inappropriate for use by the caliph.²⁹ This restricted use supports the interpretation of the symbolic message of the Abbasid investiture of Armenian kings as being solely expressive of the king's temporal power. The caliphal gift of a crown and robes, ceremonially presented to the Bagratid king by the ostikan, acknowledged the source of Armenian royal power and also served to rank the king within the Abbasid sphere of influence.³⁰ The subsequent investment of a crown by the catholicos in a religious ceremony validated the recipient's pious worthiness to rule as a Christian king. This is confirmed by John Catholicos' characterization of Smbat I's Armenian investiture as 'spiritual nuptials', from which he emerged to 'rule over all of Armenia'.³¹ The double investiture ceremony can therefore be seen as the symbolic unification, in the person of the king of Armenia, of the seemingly disparate aspects of Bagratid rule: Armenian vassalage to the caliphate and Armenian Orthodox faith.

The investment of a medieval ruler by the spiritual head of the Church was, of course, also known from Byzantium. Certainly, the example of the patriarch of Constantinople investing the emperor was a convenient and potent model.³² However, the key to understanding the symbolic importance of the Armenian investiture of a Bagratuni king does not lie in the possible emulation of Byzantine ceremonial, but is instead found in the catholicos' unique role in medieval Armenian society. The successive Sasanian, Byzantine and Islamic occupations which buffeted Armenia from the fifth through ninth centuries not only threatened the political integrity of the country, each threatened the existence of Armenian Orthodoxy. During this period, the Armenian Church was central to the development of a national

²⁸ The Bagratuni capital was peripatetic until 961, when it was established at Ani. The precise location of Ashot I's Armenian investiture is not specified, but is believed to have been at Bagaran, the Bagratuni capital at that time. See Maksoudian's comments in *ibid.*, p. 274 n. 6; Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, p. 59. For Smbat I, the catholicos clearly states that the Armenian investiture took place in a church – but does not identify it; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 132. The thirteenth-century historian Vardan notes that Smbat was invested in the church he had built at Eragzawork', but his account is confused, as he goes on to note that Smbat built this church 'after receiving royal status'; Thomson, 1989, p. 187. No location is specified for Ashot II's investiture in 918; see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 205.

²⁹ Al-Azmeh, 1997, p. 12.

³⁰ There are precedents for the recognition of an Armenian king by foreign powers – precedents that were well known in the Middle Ages. For the 66 CE coronation in Rome of the first Armenian Arsacid king, Trdat (Tiridates) I, by Nero, see Suetonius, 1935, pp. 107–9. Thomas Artsruni's awareness of this event is clear in his description of the honours bestowed upon one (surely legendary) Artsrunik' ancestor, named Khuran, by the emperor Tiberius 'in the stadium' of Rome; see Artsruni, 1991, p. 48; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 112. For the recognition of Trdat the Great by Constantine, see Agathangelos, 1976, pp. 61, 409–13; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 80; 'Trdat the Great' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix I, pp. 416–17.

³¹ Draskhanakerttsi', 1989, p. 132.

³² For a discussion of the Byzantine textual sources and bibliography, see Cameron, 1987, pp. 106–36, and Dagron, 2003, 80–84. For the suggested Armenian reliance on the Byzantine ceremonial, see Cowe, 2000, pp. 73–85, and *idem*, 1997.

identity, and the catholicos was the unifying Armenian figure. In the absence of secular unity, the catholicos took on many temporal roles, serving as judge and arbiter of civil disputes, and representing Armenian princes in their negotiations with suzerain and other powers. The catholicos thus embodied a duality of piety and power that made him, prior to the restoration of a monarchy in Armenia, the most significant Armenian authority.³³

The writings of Thomas Artsruni and John Catholicos indicate that the double investiture ceremony was afforded only once to each Bagratuni king. However, some rulers did receive additional gifts of crowns and robes from the caliph or ostikan following their investitures. Such gifts are first documented for the reign of Smbat I, and reflect the increasingly unstable political situation in Armenia and the growing power of the Sadjid ostikans. In 902, after the death of the ostikan Afshin, Smbat successfully petitioned the caliph al-Moktafi for independence from Afshin's brother and successor, Yusuf. The caliph granted Smbat's request and sent him a royal robe, crown, gem-studded gold belt and horses bedecked with arms and ornaments.³⁴ The catholicos tells us that upon receipt of these gifts, Smbat 'submitted totally to the will of the caliph', suggesting that the gifts served to formally mark the new agreement.³⁵ Yusuf, angered by Smbat's move toward autonomy, marched against the king. At the last minute a successful peace treaty was brokered and the king and ostikan 'exchanged sealed copies of the solemn agreement they had made'.³⁶

When Yusuf quit Armenia for Partaw the following spring, there was a formal exchange of gifts. The ostikan sent Smbat horses accoutred in gold-decorated armour, a jewelled crown and gold-embroidered robes. John Catholicos devotes particular attention to the crown, which, he says, was 'made out of gold and sapphire, and over which was a diadem studded with rows of pearls and other valuable gems'.³⁷ Yusuf also granted the title of presiding prince to Smbat's eldest son Ashot II, and sent to him a girdle studded with gems and a swift horse, as well as 'ornaments, armour and multicoloured garments'.³⁸ The catholicos too was 'cordially honoured' by Yusuf, and received what he terms 'robes suitable for a man in my position' and a mule adorned with golden ornaments.³⁹ Smbat reciprocated in kingly fashion, sending Yusuf gifts that numbered 'ten times more than what he had received'.⁴⁰ This exchange between Yusuf and Smbat formally acknowledged the re-establishment of the status quo, which was further reinforced by

³³ John Catholicos, for example, represented Bagratid kings in their negotiations with the ostikan; see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 163–6. For the catholicos' role in Armenian–Byzantine diplomacy, see below and *ibid.*, p. 198. For examples of the catholicos as judge and arbiter of civil disputes, see Artsruni, 1991, pp. 206, 222–3; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 269–70, 286; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 154, 202, 204–5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Interestingly, the catholicos also notes that Smbat was invited to the royal court by the caliph. There is no evidence as to whether he went, but the matter-of-fact way in which this information is related suggests that such visits were not extraordinary.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.* The catholicos' power and influence entitled him to such recognition; while he does not so state, it is possible that John played a role in negotiating the peace.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 157–8.

Yusuf's recognition of the prince Ashot II as heir to the royal title. These additional presentations of regalia and other sumptuous gifts clearly reaffirmed Bagratid secular power, and thus differed in function from the Bagratid investiture ceremony.

The Abbasid court was not the only foreign power to formally bestow titles and honours on Armenian rulers. As the title 'king of Armenia' constituted official recognition by the caliph, it is not surprising that the Byzantine emperor was quick to counter with his own recognition of Bagratuni kings. Basil I (867–886) recognized Ashot I with the title *archōn tōn archontōn* (prince of princes) in 884/85, immediately after his investiture by the ostikan. The title allowed the recipient several privileges, chief among them the right to be called the emperor's 'beloved son'.⁴¹ When Smbat I succeeded his father, the emperor Leo VI (886–912) acknowledged him with the same title, and also sent him 'beautiful weapons, ornaments, robes wrought with gold, goblets, and cups, and girdles of pure gold studded with gems' to confirm his status in the eyes of the Byzantine court.⁴² In addition to their titular distinctions, the Bagratuni kings were also the yearly recipients of imperial gifts.⁴³

It was the prerogative of the Bagratuni king to confer honours and titles on foreign rulers and on members of the Armenian nobility. Textual evidence for the Bagratuni investment of foreign kings is limited to the elevation of Georgian princes, and reflects the suzerainty of the Armenian Bagratuni over their Georgian kinsmen in this period.⁴⁴ According to John Catholicos, in 899 Smbat I forged an alliance with Atrnerseh II, the prince of Iberia. Smbat summoned him to Armenia and 'crowned Atrnerseh king with great glory and proper ceremony, outfitting him in armour befitting kings'.⁴⁵ John provides a more detailed account of Smbat's investment of Atrnerseh's son-in-law Constantine, the Georgian king of Egrisi, in 904. Smbat 'dressed him in royal robes, placed on his head a golden crown studded with pearls, and girdled his waist with a golden belt set with gems. He also equipped him with the proper things necessary for travelling, and putting under his command an army, sent him to his domain.'⁴⁶ These descriptions reveal that Smbat

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 129; Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, 1829–30, II, p. 48. *Archōn tōn archontōn* (Greek, 'chief of chiefs') is roughly equivalent to the Armenian *ishkhan ishkanats'*, see Chapter 3, note 11 below. In addition to bestowing the privilege of being called the emperor's 'beloved son' (*philos hyios*), the title-bearer also received a chrysobull of three *solidi*; Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 107 n. 165; 200.

⁴² Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 138. As there is no textual evidence that either Ashot or his son travelled to Constantinople, both must have received their titles from imperial envoys sent to Armenia. The awarding of the same title to Smbat's son, Ashot II, is discussed below. Armenian texts document the recycling of such Byzantine, or Byzantine-produced objects. When Yusuf and Smbat exchanged gifts following their peace treaty of 902/903, among the gifts Smbat presented to the ostikan was 'a belt made out of pure gold – the work of Roman craftsmen'; *ibid.*, pp. 157–58. In 914, according to the catholicos, Yusuf offered two Gnunik' princes many sumptuous gifts, among which were purple clothing and byssus – presumably these were originally from Byzantium; see *ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 158.

⁴⁴ The principal dynasties in the two countries were closely related, the founder of the Georgian royal Bagrationi family being descended from the Armenian ruling Bagratuni family. The supremacy of the Armenian branch was, of course, given greater recognition by the Armenians, and at times was denied by the Georgians; Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 334–6, 407–28.

⁴⁵ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 150–51. Atrnerseh also held the Byzantine title of *kuropalates*.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 159. This ceremony actually restored Constantine's existing status after his battle with Atrnerseh and his subsequent imprisonment by Smbat. His release was occasioned by the promotion, in Egrisi, of a royal candidate even less inclined to defer to Smbat.

employed a ceremony modelled on the Abbasid paradigm to invest Georgian rulers. In each case, the superiority of the Bagratuni king is clearly established as he assumes the role reserved in the Abbasid ceremony for the caliph or ostikan. Those receiving honours are summoned to Armenia and granted titles, sumptuous goods and military support before being sent back to their lands.⁴⁷

The kings of Armenia more commonly granted ceremonial recognition to members of the Armenian nobility. Prior to Ashot I's assumption of royal status, the caliph or his representative bestowed titles such as *marzpan* (general) and *sparapet*.⁴⁸ After the establishment of the Bagratuni monarchy, such titles were granted by the king or by a member of his family.⁴⁹ The accounts of ceremonial recognitions during Ashot I's reign are too brief to provide a clear picture of their setting or procedural, but in at least one instance there is a clear connection with the Abbasid court. According to John Catholicos, Ashot raised his son-in-law to the status of prince of Siunik', 'and obtained for him honour from the royal court', implying formal recognition by the caliph.⁵⁰

Ashot also had a son-in-law in Vaspurakan. As a pacifying tactic towards his most powerful rivals, the Artsrunik', Ashot married his daughter Sophia (Sop'i) to Derenik Artsruni. This union produced three sons: Ashot, Gagik, who would later become the first king of Vaspurakan, and Gurgēn.⁵¹ The 887 elevation of Ashot Artsruni by the authority of his grandfather, Ashot I, to the rank of prince of Vaspurakan is described twice by Thomas Artsruni. These successive accounts illustrate that the ability to grant titles and honours was one of the most significant expressions of Armenian royal authority, as Thomas first plays down the Bagratuni role, and then entirely omits their participation. He initially states that Ashot I's son Shapuh came to Vaspurakan upon the death of Grigor Artsruni and 'conferred the principality' on the latter's eldest son, Ashot Artsruni.⁵² In his second account, Thomas removes all references to the Bagratuni, and instead takes pains to

⁴⁷ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 134, notes that Smbat II crowned Bagarat III king of Abkhazia in 985, but does not provide any further details. I know of no later references to similar investitures.

⁴⁸ Both titles are Sasanian in origin, and their continued use during the Umayyad and Abbasid domination of Armenia reflects the perpetuation of Sasanian honorifics by the caliphate. For *sparapet*, see above, note 8; for the office of *marzpan*, see Christensen, 1944, pp. 133ff.

⁴⁹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 228, 235; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 291, 298, for such investitures by Shapuh, son of Ashot I, in Vaspurakan. These are discussed below.

⁵⁰ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 126–7. This prince of Siunik' was married to Ashot's daughter Mariam. For the earlier history of the royal house of Siunik', see 'Siwni' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix I, pp. 408–9. The sparse accounts of these ceremonies in the tenth-century histories are frustrating. For John Catholicos, the lesser ceremonies seem to warrant less attention. Thomas Artsruni and his continuators are understandably loath to acknowledge displays of Bagratuni power over their Artsrunik' patrons. In 921 Ashot I's grandson, Ashot II, guaranteed the allegiance of two powerful Armenian princes who travelled to Ashot's camp and received 'honours in a befitting manner', including the presentation of 'glorious distinctions'; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 202. Stephen Orbelian (1250/60–1304) notes that the princes came to Ashot's court to 'receive investiture'; see Orbelian, 1864–66, pp. 1, 38, 118–19.

⁵¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 218; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 281. The anonymous continuator lists three sons and two unnamed daughters. According to Thomas Artsruni, the earliest Artsrunik'-Bagratuni marriage alliance pre-dated Arab occupation; *ibid.*, pp. 45–6; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 109.

⁵² Artsruni, 1991, p. 228; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 291.

present Ashot's accession as the result of mutual agreement amongst the three Artsruni brothers: 'Demonstrating the extent of their fraternal deference, with incomparable courtesy each regarded the other two as superior to himself, reckoning the dignity of their princely rank to be equally shared. Merely for his precedence did they agree to give the dignity of prince to Ashot.'⁵³

Despite the decorum ascribed to them by Thomas, the Artsruni brothers were aged 5, 7 and 9 when their father died, and so Ashot I appointed a regent to oversee Vaspurakan.⁵⁴ Subsequent events reveal that the Bagratuni king not only had the authority to bestow titles, he could also remove them. In 894 Prince Ashot Artsruni went to the ostikan to petition his support for an independent Vaspurakan. Furious at this betrayal, the current Bagratuni king, Ashot's son Smbat I, granted Vaspurakan to the brothers' regent Gagik Apumruan.⁵⁵ Shapuh, Smbat's brother, came to Vaspurakan and formally appointed the regent 'lord of the principality of Vaspurakan', thereby transferring the title from Ashot Artsruni in a ceremony that is not specified in the texts.⁵⁶ After the Artsruni brothers successfully engineered the assassination of their regent, Smbat I 'had gifts and honours taken to Ashot', recognizing the *fait accompli* and reinstating Ashot as prince of Vaspurakan. To ensure Artsruni loyalty, Smbat then raised Gagik Artsruni to the rank of general, and also raised Gurgēn, the youngest Artsruni brother, to the rank of *marzpan*.⁵⁷ In his account of Gagik's appointment, Thomas provides evidence that the while the ceremonies accorded to *nakharar* by the Bagratuni were modelled after Islamic ceremonies, at least some of the privileges accorded by these ceremonies were appropriated from Byzantium. As a general, Gagik had the right to carry before him, 'according to the custom of the Byzantine emperors', banners inscribed with the cross.⁵⁸

The anonymous continuator also describes Ashot Artsruni's reinstatement to princely status. Writing after Gagik Artsruni's kingship was firmly established, he not only omits the Bagratuni participation, he maintains that it was Gagik who 'gave [the] ring into Ashot's hands, and made him master of his own inheritance with the dignity of prince'.⁵⁹ The continuator thus transfers a specifically royal prerogative from the Bagratuni and bestows it upon Gagik. This not only denies Bagratuni authority, it also manufactures early evidence of what the Artsrunik' historians present as Gagik's pre-ordained right to royal status. A similar editing is found in the descriptions by

⁵³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 231–2; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 295.

⁵⁴ Artsruni, 1991, p. 228; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 292.

⁵⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 235; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 296–7. The regency was also given to Gurgēn Apupelch, now prince of Andzavats'ik', but he died shortly after assisting Apumruan in the imprisonment of the Artsruni princes.

⁵⁶ Artsruni, 1991, p. 235; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 298. Thomas Artsruni is the only historian to add the detail that Shapuh also married his daughter to Gagik Apumruan, thus sealing the Bagratuni alliance with Vaspurakan.

⁵⁷ Artsruni, 1985, p. 301.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 272; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 335. The historian does relate that Ashot had earlier been given the title of prince, but he omits any Bagratuni role, stating merely that Ashot 'was confirmed on his father's throne'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 269; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 332. The bestowal of a ring in such ceremonies is not attested in any other medieval Armenian ceremony; it is, however, known to be component of ceremonies accorded to Arsacid princes; see above, note 25.

the Artsruni historians of Gagik's elevation to prince in 904, following the death of his elder brother. The role of the Bagratuni king is again omitted. Thomas notes only that Gagik 'took control of the principality of Vaspurakan'. He stresses that the Artsrunik' elevation was self-determined, maintaining that upon Ashot's death, Gagik and his younger brother then 'came together in mutual harmony', and decided upon an equitable distribution of land.⁶⁰ An even briefer account is provided by the anonymous continuator, who simply states that Gagik 'succeeded to the throne of Vaspurakan'.⁶¹

As described by the contemporary historians, Bagratuni ceremonial recognitions of Armenian *nakharars* and Georgian kings were purely secular in nature, and did not include any obvious religious component. For the Georgian recognitions, this undoubtedly reflects, on one level, the division between the Armenian and Georgian Churches; while the Armenian Church remained autonomous, the Georgian Church had re-joined Eastern Orthodoxy in the seventh century.⁶² However, this division does not explain the absence of religious symbolism in Bagratid recognitions of *nakharars*. It may be suggested that the explanation is found in the benefits that a restricted use of the Armenian ceremonial accorded to the Bagratuni. Limiting religious ceremonial to Bagratuni investitures increased the potency of its symbolic message. Such restriction ensured that the pious validation accorded by such investiture was only attainable by, and associated with, the Bagratuni kings. This is a key element in the development of Artsrunik' royal ceremonial, which is discussed below.

Bagratuni rule over a unified Armenia was brief, ending in 908 with the investiture of Gagik Artsruni as king of Vaspurakan. To understand how this fragmentation of Armenia came about, we now re-join the historical narrative. Smbat I, taking advantage of the turmoil caused by the death of the ostikan Afshin in 901/902, turned his attentions to expelling the Kaysite emir, who had taken lands formerly belonging to the Bagratuni. He marched against the Kaysites, aided by the Armenian armies of Vaspurakan, Andzevats'ik' and Mokk', by Georgian forces from Iberia and Abkakhzia, and by the Uthmanid emir and his troops. As a reward for his role in the successful outcome, Smbat presented the city of Nakhchavan to Ashot Artsruni.⁶³

As we have seen, when the new ostikan Yusuf was appointed in 902, Smbat I briefly achieved greater autonomy, receiving permission from the caliph al-Muktafi (902–908) to send taxes directly to the caliph, rather than forwarding them to the ostikan. This enraged Yusuf, who became determined to end Bagratuni domination and to reduce Armenia to a collection of principalities.⁶⁴ After unsuccessfully petitioning the caliph to 'reinstall Smbat under his domination', Yusuf marched on the Bagratuni king. A peace treaty

⁶⁰ Artsruni, 1991, p. 251; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 313.

⁶¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 277; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 340.

⁶² For the early evolution of the Armenian Church, including its division from the Georgian Church, see Garsoïan, 1999.

⁶³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 245–49, 276; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 308–10, 339; the claim is downplayed in Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 162–3; discussed in Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 155–6.

was successfully negotiated at the last minute by Yusuf's secretary, a Syriac Christian, and the two combatants 'exchanged sealed copies of the solemn agreement that they had made', and exchanged the gifts discussed above.⁶⁵ The treaty held, and according to the catholicos, for the next several years 'the Lord came down to the land of the Armenians. He protected everyone, and granted them success in all their undertakings.'⁶⁶

For the Artsruni, these peaceful years were marred by the death in 904 of Ashot, prince of Vaspurakan; the particular circumstance of his death will be considered in the next chapter. Suffice it for now to say that Gagik, the second son, succeeded his brother as head of the Artsruni family. According to Thomas Artsruni and his anonymous continuator, Gagik and his younger brother Gurgēn spent the next three years reclaiming Artsrunik' land from the occupying emirates, refurbishing fortresses, rebuilding ruined churches and constructing new ones. But while the treaty with the ostikan ensured peace from external aggressions, internal tensions were high, particularly between Gagik Artsruni and his uncle Smbat I.

Gagik went frequently to Partaw at this time, and although the accounts by the catholicos and Thomas Artsruni differ, it is clear that Yusuf encouraged Gagik's ambitions and sought to end any friendly co-operation between the Artsrunik' and Bagratuni that might threaten his power. Suspicious of Gagik's relations with the ostikan, Smbat transferred the fortress at Nakhchavan from Artsruni control and presented it to a rival *nakharrar*, the prince of Siunik'.⁶⁷ This ruptured completely any remaining alliance between the two families, and precipitated events that would end unified Bagratuni rule over Armenia.

Given this historical background and the disparate ties of patronage that bound Thomas Artsruni and John Catholicos, it is not surprising that they provide very different accounts of Gagik's investiture by Yusuf. According to John Catholicos, Gagik went in 907/908 to the ostikan's palace in Partaw. There he was presented with 'a royal crown, as well as honours and gifts befitting royalty'. The catholicos' low opinion of this event is evident in his remark that when Gagik returned to Vaspurakan, he was 'bearing something like a crown', and in his reference to Gagik as 'crown-bearer' rather than king.⁶⁸ While these statements undoubtedly reflect the catholicos' current allegiance to the Bagratuni king and his despair at the disintegration of Armenia, they also confirm that a second investiture, performed by the catholicos, was indispensable for the declaration of legitimate Armenian kingship. In particular, the indelible phrase 'something like a crown' suggests that trappings of royal power, such as a crown, imbued the wearer with legitimacy only when bestowed by the proper hands. As we have seen, the proper hands were those of the catholicos.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 156–7.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 162–3; Artsruni, 1985, pp. 346–51.

⁶⁸ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 163–4. The catholicos also notes that Yusuf, scheming to dissolve the unanimity between Smbat and Gagik, did not immediately reveal the fact of Gagik's kingship, and that 'after a few months', in 908, Gagik returned to Partaw and was 'once again crowned by Yusuf'; *ibid.*, p. 164.

The anonymous continuator's description of Gagik's elevation is, not surprisingly, much more flattering. According to this account, the ostikan placed on Gagik's head 'a crown of pure gold, artfully made and set with pearls and valuable precious stones, which I am unable to describe. He clothed him in a robe embroidered with gold, a girdle and sword shining with golden ornament.'⁶⁹ Gagik was then seated upon a splendidly accoutred horse, and soldiers in full armour flanked the newly crowned king while the sound of drums, trumpets, horns, flutes, lyres and harps shook the camp of the caliphal army.⁷⁰

It is clear from this description that Gagik was invested as king in an Abbasid ceremonial that paralleled those accorded to the Bagratuni kings of Armenia. Yet however splendid, Gagik's investiture was set apart from Bagratuni investitures by its lack of religious symbolism – a lack that did not escape the notice of the contemporary historians.⁷¹ John Catholicos states repeatedly that Gagik received his crown *from the hands* of the Islamic governor, effectively contrasting the agent of Gagik's investiture with the participation of the catholicos in Bagratuni ceremonial.⁷² Even the anonymous continuator, the most enthusiastic of Gagik's chroniclers, was unable to conceal the flaw in his patron's investiture and resorted to poetic licence to remedy the problem. After describing the ceremony, he states: 'I do not hesitate to say that his anointing was invisibly performed by the Holy Spirit, according to the apostles' saying: There is no authority save from God; and what is, has been established by God.'⁷³

Gagik's subsequent collusion with the ostikan against Smbat I, his uncle and former king, will be treated in detail in the following chapter. For now, we must simply note that Bagratuni rule was fragmented following Smbat's murder at the hands of the ostikan in 914.⁷⁴ Yusuf refused to recognize the status of Ashot II, Smbat's son and heir, and Ashot's subsequent struggle to claim his rightful title demonstrates the ostikan's increasing power.⁷⁵ The recognition of a Bagratuni king of Armenia no longer depended upon ancestral lineage or the support of the *nakharars* or even the caliph; the determining factor was instead the ostikan's support. It is also clear that the catholicos could not independently invest a king without such support.

Unable to secure the royal title from Yusuf, Ashot II turned elsewhere for recognition of his status. In 914 he was acclaimed king of Armenia by Gurgēn, the Georgian duke of Tayk', in a ceremony that is unfortunately not otherwise

⁶⁹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 285–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 347–8.

⁷⁰ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 285–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 347–8. This version also suggests a different chronology from that presented by the catholicos. According to the anonymous continuator, Gagik was crowned only after the ostikan had captured and imprisoned Smbat I in 913. No mention is made of Gagik's role in Smbat's capture. According to the text, it was Smbat's imprisonment which left Armenia in need of a king. This chronological manipulation allowed the historian to present Gagik's elevation as necessary for the preservation of the country, and avoided his presentation as a usurper.

⁷¹ Although the exact place of Gagik's ceremony is not recorded, as it occurred in Partaw it is unlikely to have taken place in a church.

⁷² Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 163, 164, 208.

⁷³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 285–6; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 348. This also confirms that the importance of the catholicos' role in the investiture of Armenian kings, as conveyed in John Catholicos' *History of Armenia*, does not simply reflect the identity – or occupation – of the author.

⁷⁴ The ostikan was Yusuf b. Abu' l Sadj (901–928/29), brother of the preceding ostikan, Afshin.

⁷⁵ Adontz, 1965, pp. 265–83.

described.⁷⁶ This recognition guaranteed Ashot II military assistance and provided him with a base in Georgia from which he could conduct raids into Armenian territory. It did not, however, advance his claim to kingship within Armenia. The ostikan's continued pursuit of Ashot ravaged the country, and the situation was further destabilized by *nakharars* anxious to exploit the crisis to their own advantage. In despair, the catholicos sent a letter to the Byzantine patriarch Nikolas Mystikos appealing for aid. The court dispatched an envoy with an imperial invitation for both the catholicos and Ashot II. The catholicos accepted on Ashot's behalf, but he himself demurred, 'thinking that there might be people who might look askance at my going there and assume that I sought communion with the Chalcedonians'.⁷⁷

In 915 Ashot II travelled to the Byzantine capital, where he was received with great pomp by the empress Zoë, regent (914–16) for her young son Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos.⁷⁸ Ashot was granted the title *archōn tōn archontōn*, which, as we have seen, was also previously accorded to his father and grandfather. He was dressed in purple garments and given 'valuable gold-embroidered robes, byssus with golden borders, and a girdle studded with gems for his waist'. He was also presented with armoured horses, 'as well as many cups, and utensils, and many gold and silver wares'.⁷⁹ Ashot remained in Constantinople for ten months, enjoying the hospitality of the imperial court, and then returned to Armenia accompanied by a contingent of Byzantine soldiers.⁸⁰ While on route, he received news that Yusuf had crowned his cousin, Ashot *sparapet*, king of Armenia. John Catholicos' description of the ceremony accorded to Ashot *sparapet*, known as Ashot the anti-king, reveals it to be an abbreviated version of the Abbasid ceremonial outlined above. The ostikan 'crowned the *sparapet* of Armenia as king, and girt up his loins with a sword'.⁸¹ There were now three claimants to the royal title: Ashot II, Ashot the anti-king, and Gagik Artsruni, king of Vaspurakan.

Subsequent events reveal that Ashot II's Byzantine title, while certainly prestigious, did not noticeably advance his claim to kingship within Armenia. He could not gain the Bagratid title or regain lost Bagratid lands by waging war against Gagik Artsruni of Vaspurakan, and so turned his attention to defeating his cousin the anti-king. John Catholicos' account of the subsequent civil war makes it clear that the struggle was no longer one of official recognition; he is careful to note that the status of both contenders had been legitimized by their ceremonial investitures.⁸² However, he is equally careful

⁷⁶ Draskhanakerttsi' 1987, p. 179; for Gurgēn's title, see *ibid.*, p. 294 n. 17.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁷⁸ The date of Ashot II's imperial visit has been much contested; the arguments are summarized in Runciman, 1929, pp. 249–52. I follow the chronology proposed by Adontz, 1965, pp. 265–6.

⁷⁹ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 198. The text specifies that the emperor accorded Ashot the honours, but given his age (he was 10 at the time), it is most likely that Zoë or perhaps some imperial official acted in his stead.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202; Adontz, 1965, p. 276.

⁸¹ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 202. Ashot *sparapet* was the son of Smbat I's brother, Shapuh. The ostikan ensured his loyalty by taking his wife and mother hostage. The investiture took place in the city of Duin, which was at this time the ostikan's residence in Armenia.

⁸² *Ibid.* As both, he tells us, 'had been invested with the royal honour, they turned against one another in spiteful grudge and jealousy'. It is not clear whether the catholicos is referring to Ashot II's Georgian or Byzantine recognition.

to withhold the royal title when discussing them, repeatedly referring to 'Ashot *sparapet*' and 'Ashot, son of king Smbat'. It is only after they agree to accept his terms of peace that he designates Ashot II as king.⁸³

This peace was short-lived. Over the next two years (915/16–918), each Bagratuni claimant sought to capture disputed territory and to ally the more powerful Armenian princely houses to their cause.⁸⁴ Yusuf was content to let the so-called 'war of the two Ashots' rage unchecked, as the resultant disunity prevented any possibility of Armenian resistance to his increasing control of the country. Yusuf's ambition to establish independent rule over Armenia was first evident in 911/12, when, taking advantage of the court's preoccupation with the Fatimid uprising, he stopped forwarding taxes to the caliph. In 916/17 he was joined by the emir of Shirvan, in northern Azerbaijan, and this alliance brought swift reprisals. Caliphal troops enforced a reinstatement of taxation, with penalties, from the emir. They then turned toward Partaw and Armenia, bringing with them a new ostikan intended to replace Yusuf. In 918, on the eve of caliphal attack, Yusuf abruptly agreed to grant royal status to Ashot II. While John Catholicos is silent on the matter, Nikolas Adontz argues convincingly that Ashot achieved the royal title by agreeing to ally his forces with Yusuf's against the caliph's army and the new ostikan.⁸⁵

According to the catholicos, Ashot's investiture occurred in conjunction with the previously planned celebration of his marriage, undoubtedly because of the suddenness of the ostikan's reversal. Yusuf did not come to Armenia, as had been the practice for the declaration of the first two Bagratid kings. He instead sent an envoy to present Ashot II with 'a royal crown and valuable ornaments for robes, both beautiful and becoming', as well as horses, weapons, armour, and a detachment of cavalry.⁸⁶ It is not possible to tell from this description precisely what degree of ceremony was accorded to Ashot by the ostikan's envoy – whether there was a formal ceremony of investiture or merely a presentation of regalia and gifts. Yet regardless of the manner in which Ashot acquired the crown, it is certain that it signalled the support of the ostikan, a support more forcefully expressed by the presence of the Islamic cavalry.

The Abbasid ceremony – however abbreviated – was followed by the celebration of Ashot's marriage. He was then invested by the catholicos with 'the crown that the ostikan had dispatched'.⁸⁷ This is the only extant text that specifically documents the catholicos investing a Bagratuni king with an

⁸³ The change in title occurs with a new chapter; *ibid.*, pp. 202–3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 204–5. See above, note 50, for Ashot II's investiture of two princes of Siunik'.

⁸⁵ Adontz, 1965, p. 282, convincingly suggests that this co-operation with his father's murderer is why so few *nakharars* rallied to Ashot's side at this time, including his usually supportive brother Abas, and also explains why the caliph chose this moment to send a royal crown to Gagik Artsruni.

⁸⁶ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 205. Given the historical context of Yusuf's rebellion, it is significant that the catholicos does not mention the caliph and does not present the ostikan as his representative.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* It is interesting that there was no gift of robes; it is unclear whether this reflects their relative lack of importance, the hasty preparations for the ceremony, or the possibility that the ostikan's presence was required for investiture of robes. It will be remembered from the preceding pages that robes are not mentioned in the description of Ashot I's investiture.

Islamic crown.⁸⁸ This use confirms that the crown's symbolic importance as a visible sign of the ostikan's support was secondary to the symbolism embodied by the Armenian ceremonial, in which the catholicos validated the king's pious worthiness. Like the double investiture accorded to the first two Bagratid kings of Armenia, Ashot II's investiture, however hastily planned, emphasized his pious persona over his temporal power.

Ashot the anti-king continued to claim the royal title until his death in 936, but his influence was increasingly marginalized after Ashot II's investiture. The catholicos' account of Gagik Artsruni's second investiture by Yusuf, only months after his first recognition, suggests that initially, Gagik's claim to legitimate royal status was also questionable.⁸⁹ The anonymous continuator omits this second crowning, perhaps precisely because it underscores the tenuous nature of Gagik's early claim to kingship. However, in 919 Gagik received caliphal recognition. By this time Yusuf's rebellion had ended, he had been imprisoned by the caliph and a new ostikan had been installed. According to the catholicos, the new governor 'placed on the head of king Gagik the crown he had brought with him' from the royal court, and bestowed upon him 'generous gifts'.⁹⁰ The catholicos' words suggest that a formal presentation took place in which the new Abbasid governor recognized Gagik's status as king of Vaspurakan.

The anonymous continuator also records this event, and it is clear from his account that the caliph's gifts accorded Gagik a higher degree of legitimacy and surpassed the honour conferred by his earlier investiture at the hands of the ostikan. The continuator first extols the great honour accorded to Gagik – conveniently bypassing the precedent of the first two Bagratid kings of Armenia, who, as we have seen, were similarly recognized by the caliph. He also refashions Gagik's ancestral heritage into something more royal than the facts admit: 'For me this is prodigious to relate, this for me is amazing to hear; it far surpasses my own history and those of others; no one has ever heard tell of it or seen it, to be able to reveal that anyone was honoured by the [caliph's] court with the dignity of wearing a crown, especially a Christian and orthodox believer and son of a king, the hereditary and legitimate ruler of Armenia.'⁹¹

Yusuf was released and reinstated as ostikan in 922. According to the continuator, 'he sent a crown and splendid garments to the king of Armenia

⁸⁸ It is possible that Armenian-produced crowns were used in the Armenian investitures of Ashot I and Smbat I; there is no reason why Armenian goldsmiths would not be capable of producing suitable crowns. There is, however, no mention of any such Armenian-produced regalia. The only reference to a non-Islamic crown in the possession of a Bagratid king comes in thirteenth-century Armenian accounts of a crown sent to Ashot I by Basil I, which is discussed below. The texts are more ambiguous concerning the use of robes. In John Catholicos' description of Smbat I's investiture, it is not clear whether the robes 'wrought with gold' presented by the ostikan were the same as the 'gold-embroidered robes covered with expressive designs' with which the catholicos invested Smbat; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 132.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164, notes that shortly after his first investiture, Gagik returned to Partaw, where he was 'once again crowned by Yusuf, and also exalted with honours'.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁹¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 286; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 348. Gagik's father was a prince, and not a king. His mother was the daughter of Ashot I; see Arstruni, 1991, p. 229; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 292 and n. 1. It is doubtful that the anonymous continuator is referring, however obliquely, to Gagik's maternal grandfather; he is rather inflating Gagik's lineage, and therefore his right to royal status.

Gagik to confirm the land of Armenia in his possession'.⁹² But Gagik was never invested by the catholicos. He achieved Byzantine recognition in 924/25, when the title *archōn tōn archontōn* was transferred from the Bagratuni; there is no surviving account of any accompanying ceremony. The emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos subsequently recognized both the Artsruni and Bagratuni kings as *archōn tōn archontōn*, placing them as equals above all other Armenian rulers.⁹³ Until his death, Gagik was the most powerful of the Armenian kings, but he could not compete with the pious legitimacy enjoyed by the Bagratid kings of Armenia, conferred upon them in a uniquely Armenian investiture ceremony.

While contemporary historians note that additional crowns and robes were sent to Smbat I by the caliph and the ostikan, there is no mention of supplementary investitures associated with these gifts.⁹⁴ These recognitions are therefore properly seen as honouring the recipient and confirming his temporal status. It is only during the reign of Ashot II that we find evidence of additional, formal affirmation by the caliphate of a Bagratuni king's status. According to the catholicos, after the ostikan Yusuf was imprisoned and replaced by Subuk in 921, the latter executed a peace treaty with Ashot II, granting him the title *shahanshah*. The text makes no mention of any coronation or investiture. *Shahanshah* is an Iranian title, and as it was not granted to previous Bagratid kings, it seems to have been resurrected specifically to acknowledge Ashot II's pre-eminence over Gagik Artsruni and Ashot the anti-king.

The preceding has demonstrated that ceremonial was a primary tool of Bagratuni propaganda, facilitating their reinvention as pious rulers. During the reigns of Ashot I and Smbat I, the emphasis placed on the Bagratuni king's piety through royal ceremonial burnished the family's newly reformed pious reputation. After Smbat I's death at the hands of the ostikan, this emphasis exploited what was suddenly their primary strength, as Bagratuni spiritual authority soared to unparalleled heights following the king's martyrdom, the miraculous events associated with the site of his death, and his subsequent canonization.⁹⁵ This emphasis on piety also concealed the relative weakness of the Bagratuni kings Ashot II and Abas, whose temporal power was secondary to that of Gagik Artsruni.⁹⁶ The most powerful symbol of Bagratuni rulership was their investiture by the catholicos, by which the king's unique

⁹² Artsruni, 1991, p. 287; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 349.

⁹³ At some point in the 920s, most likely after the death of Ashot II, the imperial court transferred the title *archōn tōn archontōn* from the Bagratuni and bestowed it upon Gagik Artsruni. It was restored to the Bagratuni following Gagik's death, but Byzantine sources continue to refer to the Artsrunik' kings as *archōn tōn archontōn Basparakan* (Vasparakan); Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, 1829–40, p. 687; Runciman, 1929, pp. 159–60; Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 107 n. 165, 200.

⁹⁴ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 155, 157.

⁹⁵ A divine light was seen at the site where Smbat's corpse had been crucified and set on display, and, as attested to by the catholicos, miraculous cures were effected by the soil that had been saturated with the king's blood; *ibid.*, p. 177. The presence of such a light is a standard *topos* of saintliness in Armenian historical writing. *Ibid.*, p. 89, describes a similar light hovering by the coffin of St Mesrop, and this is repeated by Vardan; see Thomson, 1989, p. 169. See also Artsruni, 1991, p. 75; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 140, for the illumination (a light in the form of a cross) of the coffin of the catholicos Mashtots. See also Artsruni, 1985, p. 208 n. 1, for this phenomenon in the earlier writings of Eghishē and Ghazar Parpets'i.

⁹⁶ The date of Gagik's death is given as 943–44 by Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 168.

pious worthiness was validated and displayed. This Armenian ceremonial remained a paradigm which could not be copied and for which there existed no substitute.⁹⁷ This is a key factor in the subsequent development of Bagratuni ceremonial.

Bagratid ceremonial 928–1043

Accounts of the ceremonial investiture of Bagratuni kings following Ashot II are sparse, for with the end of the writings of John Catholicos and Thomas Artsruni, we come also to the end of detailed contemporary descriptions of such events. Historians writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries do provide limited information, and while these later accounts must be used with care, they suggest a relatively linear evolution in Bagratuni investiture.⁹⁸ Of the elevation of Abas, Ashot II's brother, in 928, we know only that his succession was determined by an assembly of *nakharars* headed by Gagik Artsruni.⁹⁹ This emulates the process which brought Ashot I to the throne, and thus suggests a similar emulation of Ashot's double investiture ceremony, as does the fact that the ostikan Yusuf (d. 929) had been restored to power at the time.

The investiture of Abas's son, Ashot III, is described by the twelfth-century historian Matthew of Edessa (Matt'eos Urhayets'i), who relates that while Ashot III succeeded his father in 952/53, he did not receive formal investiture until 961.¹⁰⁰ While Matthew does not explain this nine-year gap, it was in 961 that the catholicos Anania Mokats'i moved his seat from Vaspurakan, where it had been located since 924, to Argina, near the newly established Bagratuni capital of Ani. The catholicos' first recorded act after this relocation is his investiture of Ashot III – a testament to the symbolic significance of this ceremony. In this context, the timing of Ashot III's investiture seems engineered to highlight the piety of the king and to erase the memory of the previous Artsrunik' patronage of the catholicos. It also raises the question of whether during the years 924–61 the catholicos' participation in the investiture of a Bagratuni king was dependent upon the permission of the Artsrunik' king. If so, this could explain Matthew's remarks concerning the coronation of Ashot III – that 'there was great rejoicing throughout all Armenia, for the people witnessed the reestablishment of the royal throne of Armenia as it had existed among their ancestors'.¹⁰¹ It is possible that the

⁹⁷ Orbelian, 1864–66, p. 173, documents that the bishop of Siunik' anointed the Bagratuni princes of Siunik' as early as the third quarter of the tenth century. This emulation of the Armenian investiture ceremony of the senior branch of the family attests to its prestige.

⁹⁸ An example is Orbelian's account of the coronation of Ashot I, which is reconfigured to resemble late Bagratuni investitures. Orbelian states that Ashot I received unction from the catholicos, and does not mention his ceremonial recognition by the ostikan; Orbelian, 1864–66, p. 107. This, I suggest, reflects the ceremonial as practised in the late twelfth century.

⁹⁹ Grousset, 1973, pp. 464–5.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, p. 20. Ashot III 'had not yet occupied the royal throne of Armenia and the crown had not been placed upon his head'. Matthew wrote in the first decades of the twelfth century; his contribution to his history ends c. 1136.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

'ancestors' to whom Matthew refers were not just the Armenian Arsacid kings, as the phrase is generally interpreted, but also included the early Bagratuni kings.

In his description, Matthew also notes that Ashot III 'was anointed king as his ancestors had been anointed'.¹⁰² Does this reveal a procedural change in the royal ceremonial? Anointment is mentioned only once in the surviving accounts of the investitures of the first three Bagratuni kings. According to John Catholicos, his predecessor conferred on Ashot I 'the divine benediction of spiritual blessings *instead* of the anointment with the chrim'.¹⁰³ While this suggests that anointment was a standard component of the Armenian investiture ceremony, the catholicos does not mention it in connection with the coronations of Smbat I or Ashot II.¹⁰⁴

For confirmation of anointment as a standard element of Bagratid ceremonial during the tenth century, we must turn, rather surprisingly, to the most enthusiastic panegyrist of the Artsruni house, the anonymous continuator. As we have seen, the continuator takes considerable literary licence to remedy the absence of a religious ceremony in Gagik Artsruni's 908 investiture. After describing Gagik's coronation by the ostikan, he suggests an addendum, an anointment 'invisibly performed by the Holy Spirit'.¹⁰⁵ This confirms the essential, symbolic importance of royal anointment, and verifies that the tenth-century Bagratuni kings did receive ceremonial anointment – and that the Artsrunik' did not. The continuator's account also allows us to accept Matthew of Edessa's description of Ashot III's investiture as evidence of the continuation of the Armenian ceremonial into the second half of the tenth century.

The importance of the ceremonial anointment of Bagratid kings may be linked with their claim of descent from David. This claim first appears in the *History* of John Catholicos, but it was also known to Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, suggesting that it was formulated in late ninth or early tenth century.¹⁰⁶ The Bagratids' Davidic lineage was thus promoted when they first achieved royal status – a time, as we have seen, when they actively sought to bolster their pious reputation. Such an illustrious genealogy would also strengthen their right to rule by presenting David's divinely ordained kingship as a paradigm to which their accession could be favourably

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁰³ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 128; emphasis added. Maksoudian suggests that Ashot was not anointed because his ceremony fell on a Wednesday, a day of fasting; *ibid.*, p. 273 nn. 4–6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132. He states only that 'the patriarch Gēorg pronounced the solemn blessing on Smbat I', language that echoes that used for the elevation of Ashot I and which suggests that Smbat was not anointed. As we have seen above, the catholicos' account of Ashot II's elevation to kingship is even less descriptive, noting only that the new king was invested 'with the crown the ostikan had dispatched'. The absence of any specific reference to anointment is particularly odd in relation to Smbat's investiture, at which John Catholicos presided, and demonstrates the pitfalls of relying on a single text.

¹⁰⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 286; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 348.

¹⁰⁶ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 40, 73; Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, 1967, ch. 45. This claim is not known to Moses Khorenats'i, providing a *terminus ad quem* of the late eighth or early ninth century, according to modern scholarship; see Toumanoff, 1969, pp. 328–9; Marquart, 1913/61, p. 391. For the problematic dating of Khorenats'i, with bibliography, see the introduction by Thomson in Khorenats'i, 1978. The claim of Davidic descent replaced the Bagratuni's previous claim of descent from Hayk', mythical primogenitor of Armenia, and, prior to the conversion of Armenia, their descent from the solar god; Toumanoff, 1969, p. 201; 'Bagratuni' in [Pseudo] P'awstos Buzand, 1989, Appendix I, pp. 362–3.

compared. It is thus possible to see the Bagratuni claim of Davidic descent and their related ceremonial anointment as a response to the difficulties encountered in attempting to restore a monarchy to Armenia. It was, I suggest, part of the Bagratuni campaign to reinvent themselves as pious rulers.

There is no evidence suggesting a continued use of the Abbasid ceremony after 928. While Ashot III's investiture undoubtedly validated his temporal powers, he did not receive the Islamic ceremonial accorded to his royal predecessors. Following his anointment by the catholicos, Ashot reviewed the assembled Armenian troops and received gifts from Georgian, Byzantine, Armenian, Arab and Turkish dignitaries. While crowns and robes may have been among these gifts, Matthew does not mention any formal investiture ceremony.¹⁰⁷ It is clear that by the time of Ashot III – if not earlier – the double investiture accorded to the first three kings of Armenia was no longer practised. Certainly, this reflects the diminishing influence of the Abbasid caliphate and the shift in power away from the ostikan. Following Yusuf's death in 929 and the subsequent fall of the Sadjid emirs of Azerbaijan, no single emirate was powerful enough to substantially influence the election of a Bagratuni king. As we shall see, the struggle for power shifted to the competing branches of the surviving Armenian princely houses.

There are no descriptions of the investitures of Ashot III's sons. The eldest, Smbat II, ruled from 977–89 and was then succeeded by his brother Gagik I.¹⁰⁸ Gagik also received the title *shahanshah*, which had become hereditary.¹⁰⁹ In this later period, this title served primarily to distinguish the rule of the senior Bagratuni king from those of his royal kinsmen. While the fragmentation of Armenia began in 908 with Gagik Artsruni's investiture as king of Vaspurakan, the greatest blow to unified Bagratuni rule was inflicted by Ashot III, who began the practice of awarding royal titles to members of the ruling family. In 961 he granted his brother Musegh the title 'king of Kars and Vanand', the district northwest of the new capital of Ani. In 964 the prince of Siunik', Smbat Bagratuni, declared his independence and claimed royal status. In 980 Gurgēn, the youngest son of Ashot III, was invested as king of Tashir-Dzoraget, to the north of Ani, by the bishop of Siunik'.¹¹⁰

When Gagik I died in 1017 or 1020, the royal title was contested by his two elder sons. Ashot IV, the younger of the two brothers, was victorious in the civil war that followed, but according to Matthew of Edessa, the succession was ultimately decided by an assembly and bound by oaths administered by the catholicos Peter.¹¹¹ Ashot IV was then made king of all 'the country

¹⁰⁷ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, pp. 20–21.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, pp. 137, 138.

¹⁰⁹ For the title, see Maksoudian's comments in Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 303–4 n. 5. For the date of Ashot II's recognition as *shahanshah*, see Adontz, 1965, p. 278; however, on p. 282 he dates the same event to 919. For Ashot III and Gagik I, see Grousset, 1973, pp. 464–5; Matthew of Edessa, 1993, pp. 29, 43 and correction, p. 295.

¹¹⁰ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. xxi; Orbelian, 1866, p. 172. Gurgēn is given the title 'king' by Matthew of Edessa, 1993, p. 27, in his description of the assembly of Hark in 974. With the exception of texts indicating that the Siunik' investiture featured anointment by the bishop of Siunik', we have no further details as to the method by which these kings were ceremonially recognized.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7.

outside Ani', while his elder brother John (Yovhannēs)-Smbat was given the title 'king of Ani' and the surrounding district of Shirak.¹¹² Ashot IV's son Gagik II was the last Bagratuni king of Armenia. He succeeded his father in 1041 after a struggle with factions supporting his regent. Matthew of Edessa tells us that Gagik was brought to Ani under the protection of the prince Gregory Pahlawuni, and was then anointed king by the catholicos Peter in an otherwise undescribed ceremony. He spent the last year of his two-year reign as a virtual prisoner in Constantinople, and in 1043 he abdicated his lands to Byzantium.¹¹³

The accounts of the investitures of these later Bagratuni rulers are sketchy at best, but it is clear that those following the rule of Ashot II were much altered from the ceremonial recognition of the first three kings of Armenia. The contemporary descriptions of the elevations of Ashot I, Smbat I and Ashot II each featured a double investiture ceremony. Following John Catholicos' account of the investiture of Ashot II, there is no further record of the formal investiture of a Bagratuni king of Armenia by anyone other than the catholicos.

¹¹² Aristakēs Lastivert (writing in 1072–87), 1973, pp. 9–10.

¹¹³ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, p. 67. For the Pahlawunis in general, s.v. 'Pahlawuni', *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 9 (1987), pp. 327–28.

Bagratuni royal portraits

Images of medieval rulers, like ceremonial, served to visually characterize royal power and piety.¹ Any assessment of the visual expression of medieval Armenian rulership during the Bagratuni period is hampered by the scarcity of surviving works of art and architecture. Few sculptures and fewer painted images survive. The Bagratuni kings did not mint their own coins, further reducing the possible sources of royal representation.² The successive foreign invasions of Armenia in the fifth through the ninth centuries have left only a few surviving examples and, as we shall see, those remaining from the tenth and eleventh centuries are scarcely more numerous.³ Modern conflicts have frequently led to the further damage or destruction of surviving works, or have prevented their proper archaeological exploration.

There are no surviving depictions of Bagratuni rulers or descriptions of lost images from the first half of the tenth century. It therefore at first seems impossible to compare the expression of early Bagratuni kingship, as manifest in royal portraits, with that promoted by Bagratuni investiture ceremonial. However, Bagratuni portraits do survive from the second half of the tenth century.

In 967 Ashot III and his wife Khosrovanush either constructed or rebuilt a church dedicated to the Holy Saviour (*Amenap'rkits*) in the monastery of Sanahin, located in the northern district of Tashir-Dzoroget.⁴ Portraits of two of their sons, Gurgēn and Smbat, are carved in low relief and set in a niche beneath the gable on the east façade (Figure 3.1). An inscription carved on the surrounding frame identifies the right-hand figure as Smbat and names him

¹ There are, for instance, multiple surviving examples of Byzantine portraits that depict the emperor receiving his crown from the hand of God. For a manuscript portrait depicting Constantine IX Monomachos crowned by Christ, see Spatharakis, 1976, pp. 99–102, fig. 66. For an illumination of Constantine and his empress, Eudokia, crowned by Christ, see *ibid.*, pp. 102–6, fig. 68; for an illumination depicting John II Komnenos and his eldest son Alexios being crowned by Christ, see *ibid.*, pp. 79–83, fig. 46. A manuscript portrait of an imperial family, including the crowning of the emperor by Christ, is discussed in Anderson, Canart and Walter, 1989, pp. 15ff., 55–6. An enamel on the Khakhuli Triptych now in the State Museum of Fine Arts in Tbilisi shows Michael VII Doukas and his Georgian empress, Maria, being crowned by Christ; Amiranashvili, 1964, pp. 93–111.

² For the mint at Duin, active in the tenth century and controlled by the ostikan, see Ter Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 13–14, 77–9. In the absence of Armenian coinage, the currency in use was Arab and, to a lesser degree, Byzantine. For the possible Armenian knowledge of Byzantine coins in the eleventh century, see below, note 20. A single seal, attributed by Krachkovskaia, 1946, to Ashot I, bears only an Arabic inscription that reads 'Ashot son of Smbat'. I thank Prof. Boris Briker of Villanova University for translating this article from the Russian.

³ The church of Mren, dating to the second or third decade of the seventh century, retains depictions of the prince Nerseh Kamsarakan and the prince David Saharuni. See Thierry and Thierry, 1971, pp. 73–114. A prince of Siunik' is depicted in the church at Sisavan, dated to 691; see Der Manuelian, 1984, p. 185, plate 6. Nothing survives from the eighth and ninth centuries.

⁴ Modern-day northern Armenia. For the construction of the medieval monastery, see Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, pp. lix–lx, 40; Samuel of Ani, 1979, pp. 436–7; Thomson, 1989, p. 189 – but see also p. 188, where Vardan notes Sanahin was built 'during the rule of Abas' by monks expelled from Byzantium.

3.1 Gurgēn and Smbat Bagratuni, east façade, Church of the Holy Saviour, Sanahin



as king. The use of the royal title reveals the inscription to be a later addition; the iconography of the portraits indicates that when they were erected, Gurgēn and Smbat's father, Ashot III, was the Bagratuni king.

The figures of the princes are symmetrically arranged, and hold between them a model of the church. They are the same height and exhibit the same posture, with heads turned frontally toward the viewer and bodies shown in profile. The faces are carved with identical, simply delineated features, including long, forked beards and conjoined eyebrows. They wear identical tunics with voluminous sleeves. The tunics are carved with deep lines in imitation of flowing drapery, but otherwise show no decorative patterns. The figures also wear identical, three-peaked headdresses with pendants and long flaps, or lappets, framing their faces. The pendants are *prependoulia*, an element of Byzantine regalia restricted to members of the imperial family. Lappets were a characteristic feature of the crowns worn by the Armenian Arsacid kings, as demonstrated by coins of the period.⁵

Three aspects of the royal portraits at Sanahin are particularly noteworthy: the choice to depict only two of Ashot III's three sons, the identical appearance of the two sculpted figures, and the unique headgear. Of these, only the headgear has attracted scholarly attention, and its discussion has, I suggest, been complicated by thirteenth-century accounts relating the presentation of a crown to Ashot I by the Byzantine emperor Basil I. References to this supposed crown have proliferated in the literature, and this imperial gift has in turn been invoked as evidence of Byzantine crowns in Bagratuni possession in the tenth century, and thus as support for a Byzantine provenance of the princely headgear at Sanahin.⁶ As this has broad implications for the interpretation of Bagratuni royal portraiture, the matter deserves further examination.

According to the Armenian historians Vardan Arewelts'i (d. 1271) and Kirakos Gandzakets'i (c. 1200–1271), Basil I sent a crown to Ashot I in 885, immediately following the caliph's recognition of Ashot's royal status.⁷ Several factors support the conclusion that this crown is a literary fabrication. As we have seen, according to John Catholicos, Basil did honour Ashot with the title *archōn tōn archontōn* after the latter's investiture. However, neither the catholicos nor his contemporary Thomas Artsruni mentions a crown as part of the imperial gifts sent to Ashot.⁸ In fact, there is no surviving textual reference

⁵ For examples of Arsacid coinage, with discussion and bibliography, see Bedoukian, 1978, esp. pp. 4–5 for the discussion of the 'Armenian tiara'. For the crowns of the rulers of Armenia and of Lazica during the post-Arsacid period, see Toumanoff, 1969, p. 135 n. 235.

⁶ Grousset, 1973, p. 395; Der Nersessian, 1978, p. 81; Cuneo and Alpago-Novello, 1984, p. 13; Evans, 1997, pp. 485–507; Cowe, 2000, p. 78. Evans, 1997, p. 488, suggests that the headgear worn by the princes at Sanahin resembles crowns depicted on coins issued by the emperor Basil I, and thus are meant to imitate Byzantine regalia. For discussion and illustration of the Byzantine coin in question, see Spatharakis, 1976, p. 98, fig. 65. The crowns on the coinage of Basil I do not, in my estimation, resemble the Armenian princes' headgear as they do not feature the same distinctive three-pointed profile. And, to my knowledge, no Byzantine crown sports lappets, as are found at Sanahin.

⁷ Thomson, 1989, p. 187; Kirakos of Gandjak (Gandzakets'i), 1986, p. 72.

⁸ According to the catholicos, 'Basil, the great emperor of the Greeks, also offered terms of peace – which were in no way trivial, harmony and friendship to our king Ashot, whom he addressed as "beloved son", and he communicated this to all the kingdoms in his dominion'; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 129. Thomas Artsruni ignores virtually all aspects of Ashot's succession to the royal title; see Artsruni 1985, p. 291 and n. 9.

to this gift until the second half of the thirteenth century, and there is no mention in the Armenian histories of any other Bagratuni king receiving a crown from a Byzantine emperor. As discussed above, Ashot's grandson, Ashot II, did travel to Constantinople, and was honoured by the imperial court. A crown was not among the many splendid gifts he received while there.

Further evidence against Ashot I's Byzantine crown can be marshalled from the Byzantine point of view. Cyril Toumanoff noted that the word *basileus* was not used to refer to foreign rulers after the seventh century, when it became the official Byzantine translation of *imperator*.⁹ Imperial policy initiated by Basil I codified this view of Byzantine hegemony. Basil saw the imperial role as that of *kosmokrator*, recognizing all other rulers as inferior to and dependent upon the emperor.¹⁰ This policy is reflected in tenth-century Byzantine sources that never assign Ashot I a royal title, but consistently refer to him as *archōn tōn archontōn*, loosely translated as 'prince of princes'.¹¹ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos makes clear his observance of this policy in *De Administrando Imperio*, discussing how to deflect foreign requests for imperial regalia.¹² Furthermore, the earliest Byzantine textual reference to the presentation of an imperial crown to a foreign ruler is dated to the reign of the emperor Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–95).¹³ This is significant, as it indicates that such practice was contemporary with Vardan and Kirakos, and suggests that their reports of the gift of an imperial crown to Ashot I reflect contemporary, rather than tenth-century, imperial custom.¹⁴

Another tale, first related by Vardan, also involves Ashot I, Basil I and a crown, but here it is Ashot who presents the crown. This story originates with the vision of the fourth-century Armenian Saint Sahak that the Arsacid line will be restored. Adontz has demonstrated how this vision was exploited by the Byzantine court in the tenth century, after the death of Basil I. Here Basil's

⁹ Toumanoff, 1969, p. 107 n.165. For use of the term *basileus* in the early Byzantine period, see Chrysos, 1978, pp. 29–75.

¹⁰ Basil's policy is best illustrated in his dealings with Western rulers, most notably the 'emperor' Lewis II; see Jenkins, 1987, pp. 185–9 and bibliography.

¹¹ While the literal translation is closer to 'chief of chiefs', G. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins render *archōn tōn archontōn* as 'prince of princes' in their translation of *De Administrando Imperio*; see Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, 1967, ch. 43, 44.

¹² Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, 1967, pp. 67ff. Constantine was undoubtedly mindful of the near debacle in 913 when the Bulgarian khan Symeon demanded investiture as *basileus*. What actually happened remains unclear and is still debated; but the texts do agree that Symeon was not crowned with an imperial *stemma*, but rather had a patriarchal scarf placed on his head. The literature on this event is best summarized by Karlin-Hayter, 1968, pp. 29–39. In 913 Constantine VII was 7, and the recognition of Symeon was overseen by the patriarch Nikolas Mystikos – who, three years later, invited Ashot II to the imperial court.

¹³ *Chronicon Magnus Presbyteri*, 1826–96, ed. Wattenbach; I thank Anthony Cutler for this reference. There is also a single recorded instance in the sixth century when a crown was sent to newly converted ruler of Laz. In this case there were apparently no dividing issues of orthodoxy which, I suggest, would have effected the middle Byzantine stance on such a gift. See Dagron, 2003, pp. 214–15 and esp. n. 98. The two surviving examples of Byzantine 'crowns' sometimes purported to have been gifts to foreign rulers, the so-called crown of Constantine IX Monomachos and the Hungarian Crown of St Stephen, date to the second half of the eleventh century. This renders any further discussion of their original form or function unnecessary in the context of this study, as they post-date both Ashot I and Basil I. For these works, see Kovacs and Lovag, 1980; Oikonomides, 1994, pp. 241–62.

¹⁴ If the thirteenth-century accounts are accepted, it remains to be explained how, at Sanahin, one imperial *stemma* became two identical crowns, why they feature lappets, and why such lofty regalia is accorded to Bagratid *princes*.

Arsacid ancestry identifies him as the fulfilment of the divine prophecy, and thus both justifies and excuses his bloody path to imperial power.¹⁵ Armenian writers in turn exploited the advantages of this tale for Armenia. Vardan tells us that Basil, made aware of his Arsacid ancestry by an Armenian bishop of Tarōn, desired to fully emulate the Arsacid coronation ritual. He therefore sent an ambassador to the Armenian court to request a crown *from* king Ashot I, and also requested that Ashot re-create the ancestral Bagratuni role of coronant to the Arsacid kings by participating in Basil's coronation.¹⁶ It is, I suggest, noteworthy that the Byzantine empire, previously feared for its eastward expansions and its claim of primacy over the Armenian Church, was significantly weakened at the time Vardan and Kirakos were composing their histories.

Whether the thirteenth-century Armenian reports of an imperial crown in the possession of tenth-century Bagratuni kings are accepted or rejected, they do not provide the only evidence that can be used to explain the presence of *prependoulia* on the sculptures at Sanahin. The Bagratuni portraits are not the only Caucasian royal images that include *prependoulia* – nor are they the earliest. *Prependoulia* are found in a Georgian royal portrait dated to 963–66. The south façade of the cathedral at Osk Vank (modern Oshki, Turkey) displays the sculpted images of another pair of princely brothers, Davit III and Bagrat Bagrationi, rulers of Tayk'and members of the Georgian branch of the Bagratuni family (Figures 3.2a and 3.2b). They are depicted wearing an impressive assemblage of Byzantine regalia, including *chlamydes*, tunics, and crowns. Antony Eastmond has demonstrated that these costumes are antiquated in comparison to contemporary imperial portraits; they certainly do not accurately reflect the brothers' ranking in the Byzantine hierarchy.¹⁷ Davit, the elder brother, held the relatively minor Byzantine title of *magistros*, but it is the younger brother's crown that features *prependoulia*.¹⁸

The Georgian portraits provide evidence that elements of Byzantine regalia, including *prependoulia*, were recognized and valued for the symbolic power they conveyed.¹⁹ The royal images at Osk Vank, when considered together with those at Sanahin, also suggest that *prependoulia* were established in the wider, Caucasian tradition of royal representation by the second half of the tenth century. The headdresses at Sanahin with their Byzantine and Arsacid elements may therefore be seen as an assemblage of generally recognized royal symbols, much as the Osk Vank portraits feature an assemblage of imperial regalia.²⁰ The *prependoulia* at Sanahin speak in general terms of royal status.

¹⁵ Adontz, 1965, pp. 85–6; Theophanes Continuatus, 1828–97.

¹⁶ Thomson, 1989, p. 186.

¹⁷ Contemporary imperial imagery shows the emperor in the *loros* rather than the *chlamys*; Eastmond, 1998, pp. 26–7, 228–30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229, indicates that both brothers' crowns have *prependoulia*. Despite the damage that both images have suffered, it is clear that only Bagrat's crown has *prependoulia*, as the surface on either side of Davit's head is quite smooth.

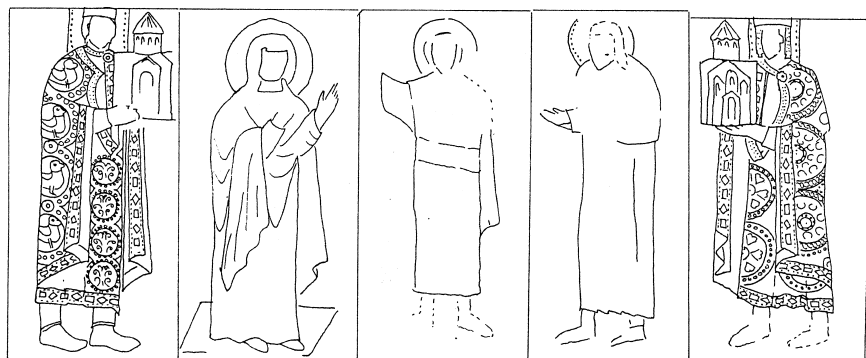
¹⁹ Methods of transmission are discussed below.

²⁰ As is well known, medieval Armenia was characterized by its appropriation and adaptation of foreign iconography and ideology. The appropriation of caliphal ideology has been demonstrated in the preceding discussion of Bagratid ceremonial; similar phenomena have been demonstrated for other areas

3.2a Davit III and Bagrat Bagrationi, south façade, Osk Vank Cathedral



3.2b Drawing, Davit III and Bagrat Bagrationi, south façade, Osk Vank Cathedral



What is remarkable about the portraits at Sanahin – and what has been overlooked in discussions of the headgear – is that as a whole the figures convey an overwhelming impression of fraternal unity and equality. They are identical in size, form, and dress. This is extraordinary in an age when a primary function of royal art is the visual expression of hierarchical distinctions of rank. The choice of subjects is equally in need of explanation. Why are only the eldest and youngest sons of Ashot III depicted? Where is Gagik, the

of medieval Armenian society. For this phenomenon in liturgy, see Taft, 1998, pp. 13–30; for such appropriation in manuscript illumination, see Mathews and Wieck, 1994, pp. 54–65, esp. 60–65. A slightly later example of the appropriation of Byzantine imperial iconography is attributed to the younger of the two brothers depicted at Sanahin. Philip Grierson identified Gurgēn I as the ruler named on a bronze follis as Kiurike (Gurgēn), ‘king of Lori’, a title he received by 980. The bronze follis imitates coins minted by John I Tzimiskes (969–76) and Basil II (976–1025). The obverse of the coin features a bust of Christ, while the reverse carries a five-line Armenian inscription, ‘may the Lord aid Kiurike the Khorapaghat (*kuropalates*)’. Grierson convincingly argues that Gurgēn, who served as the primary liaison between Ashot III and John Tzimiskes when the latter came to Armenia in 974, would reasonably have had opportunity to be rewarded for his services with a title such as *kuropalates*. He cites as precedent a mid-ninth-century Armenian prince of Tarōn who also was designated *kuropalates*; Grierson, 1962, pp. 107–12, with bibliography of earlier literature. In the bronze follis and, I suggest, in the royal portraits at Sanahin, elements of Byzantine iconography were appropriated and reused.

middle son? Contemporary events provide the answers, and also, it may be suggested, reveal the primary message of the portraits at Sanahin.

Armenian historians document the succession woes of Ashot III and his son Smbat II. In 961 Ashot III's brother Musegh contested Ashot's right to the throne, and as we have seen, was conciliated with the title king of Kars and Vanand. This occurred six years before the portraits at Sanahin were erected. Musegh's continued refusal to acknowledge Ashot's status and his later attempted coup against his nephew Smbat II demonstrates that he remained a very real threat.²¹ He was not alone. Ashot III's middle son, Gagik, was expelled from the court 'for suspicion of treachery' following his father's death in 977 and the accession of his elder brother Smbat.²² The absence of any depiction of Gagik at Sanahin suggests that his threat to the designated line of succession preceded Ashot III's death. This is also suggested by a contemporary description of Smbat's accession to the royal title; contrary to normal practice, he was invested as king on the day of his father's death, thus preventing any attempts to usurp his claim to the throne.²³ This historical context makes it possible to see the portraits at Sanahin as a visual presentation of dynastic unity in response to challenges to the order of royal succession. In the context of this message the derivation of the 'crowns' assumes less importance; like all other elements of the portraits, the headgear serves to underscore the princes' dynastic solidarity.²⁴

The church of the Holy Sign (*Surb Neshan*) at Haghbat provides supporting evidence for this interpretation. Haghbat, located near Sanahin in Tashir-Dzoroget, was also built by Khosrovanush, and it too features portraits of her sons Gurgēn and Smbat.²⁵ As at Sanahin, the sculpted images of the two brothers are placed high on the east façade within the confines of a rectangular niche beneath the gable (Figure 3.3). Their figures are again symmetrically arranged within the niche, and they again hold between them a model of their church. The facial features of the two are identical, with long, rounded beards, hair indicated by rows of uniform corkscrew curls, and the same conjoined eyebrows found on their portraits at Sanahin. However, at

²¹ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, pp. 39, 49, 51.

²² Thomson, 1989, p. 189. The nature of Vardan's account, which is primarily a compilation from other sources, makes it possible to question some of his assertions, such as the gift of a Byzantine crown to Ashot I, while accepting others. The veracity of his account of the history of the Bagratuni as it relates to Sanahin is bolstered by the fact that he was a monk there for many years, and would therefore have had access to documents concerning the monastery.

²³ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 137.

²⁴ A similar sense of fraternal unity is projected by Thomas Artsruni. As discussed above, he goes to great lengths to demonstrate the bonds between Gurgēn, Gagik and Ashot Artsruni after the death of their father, culminating in the rather improbable claim that 'each regarded the other [two] as superior to himself, reckoning the dignity of their princely rank to be equally shared'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 232; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 295. After Ashot's death, he presents the remaining brothers once again coming together 'in mutual harmony inspired by affable love for each other with no thoughts of evil. They combined noble intention and generous inspiration, putting aside all thoughts of hostile intent and folly, and embraced each other in their desire for the good and advantageous prosperity and peace of their native land, to which they devoted their diligent care'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 251; translated in Artsruni, 1985 p. 313. Thomas's anonymous continuator does not, it should be noted, go to such lengths, and indeed his descriptions of the accession of Ashot and Gagik Artsruni leave out all references to fraternal respect, and instead focus on praising Gagik and stressing Gurgēn's love and obedience towards his elder brother's rule; see Artsruni, 1991, pp. 269, 278–80; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 332, 341–2.

²⁵ Mnats'akanian and Alpagò-Novello, 1980, p. 12.

3.3 Gurgēn and Smbat Bagratuni, east façade, Church of the Holy Sign, Haghbat



Haghbat the brothers' relative rank is given clear visual expression, confirming historical accounts that date the portraits to 977, when Smbat succeeded his father as king of Armenia.²⁶

Smbat's royal status – and his superior rank *vis-à-vis* his brother – is most immediately apparent in his costume. He wears an elaborate woven turban, while Gurgēn wears a cap-like helmet.²⁷ While the figures are similarly clothed in undecorated mantles worn over plain tunics and high riding boots strapped at the ankle, Smbat's dress is more elaborate. The sleeves of his mantle are gathered into smooth, wide cuffs, and his boots feature two straps. In contrast, Gurgēn's sleeves terminate in small, loose folds, and his boots have one strap. The severity of both brothers' dress is relieved only by the voluminous material of their tunic sleeves, which project beyond the cuffs of their mantles and hang down from their extended arms. Even this detail serves to express their relative rank. Smbat's sleeves are large and hang straight down, while Gurgēn's are smaller and bend toward his body, as if blown backward by the majesty emanating from his royal brother.²⁸

While the costumes are the most immediate indicators of rank, Smbat's superior status is also communicated in other ways. He is placed to the viewer's right. If a figure – such as that of Christ, for example – is imagined to be present before the carved figures, accepting the church they present, Smbat

²⁶ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, pp. lix, lx.

²⁷ Gurgēn's helmet, while unique in surviving Armenian imagery, bears comparison to late Sasanian helmets, known as *spangenhelm*; see Simpson, 1996, pp. 87–127, esp. 97, illustrated plate 2 a/b.

²⁸ Smbat's tunic sleeves thus seemingly emulate the static nature for which the Byzantine emperor was celebrated, and which is a characteristic of imperial portraiture. For a discussion, with bibliography, of *taxis* and *ataxia*, see H. Maguire, 1997, pp. 183–91, esp. 185–7. I know of no parallel use of this wonderfully sophisticated device in Georgian royal imagery.

would be on Christ's favoured side, at his right hand.²⁹ Smbat's image is also given greater frontality, as it is turned out, towards the viewer, to a greater degree than the figure of his brother. Smbat is also placed closer to the model of the church. His left arm, which grasps the model, is bent at a ninety-degree angle and held close to his body, while Gurgēn's corresponding arm (his right) is almost fully extended. Both figures are carved to the same height, filling the niche, but this seeming equality of stature is illusionary, for without his helmet, Gurgēn would be the shorter of the two.

Smbat's royal status is thus conveyed by a variety of artistic devices: frontality, scale, placement and the use of sumptuous costume. All of these devices are widespread in medieval art. The use of frontality to convey rank has a venerable history, with origins in Roman imperial art; it subsequently spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean.³⁰ While frontality is one of the most recognizable features of Byzantine imperial imagery, its use at Haghbat should be seen as part of the artistic legacy Armenia shares with Byzantium, and not as an imitation of contemporary imperial iconography.³¹ The hierarchic use of scale is found in the art of Islam, Byzantium and Georgia, in addition to Armenian royal imagery, testifying to its dissemination throughout the medieval Mediterranean world.³² The preferential placement of donor images at Christ's right side is found in contemporary Armenian, Georgian and Byzantine imagery.³³ Haghbat, with its forceful expressions of the distinctions of rank, proves the norm in the depiction of medieval royal status, and illustrates just how remarkable are the earlier portraits at Sanahin.

When Smbat died in 989/90, his exiled brother was recalled and installed as the Bagratuni king Gagik I (998/90–1017 or 1020).³⁴ After attaining royal status, Gagik founded the church of St Gregory the Illuminator at Ani. In 1906 a life-sized sculpture depicting Gagik holding a model of his church on his outstretched arms was discovered in the rubble of the church ruins (Figure 3.4).³⁵ The portrait, which vanished during the First World War, was the only known example of medieval Armenian sculpture in the round.³⁶ According to Nikolas Marr, the excavator of the site, the statue measured 2.26 metres in

²⁹ As discussed above, when the inscription was added to the lintel surrounding the niche at Sanahin, Smbat was named as the right-hand figure. As the statues of the two brothers are otherwise indistinguishable from each other, this choice must also reflect the hierarchy of placement evident at Haghbat and the choice to give pride of placement to the royal brother.

³⁰ MacCormack, 1981, pp. 101, 189–90, 190–92, 203, 214. For examples from the medieval Islamic world, see Grabar, 1954, pp. 185–7; *Casket of Abd al-Malik*, in Dodds, ed., 1992, pp. 198–201.

³¹ Maguire, 1997, pp. 185–7.

³² For examples from medieval Islamic art, see Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1994, p. 57, fig. 29; p. 152, fig. 131; p. 238, fig. 253. For Byzantium, see Maguire, 1997, pp. 183–91. For Georgia, see Eastmond, 1998, pp. 20–26, figs 12–14.

³³ For a general discussion, see Friedman, 1980, pp. 123–30. For Armenia, see below for the west façade portrait of Gagik Artsruni, who is placed to the right of the figure of Christ, and Jones, 1994, pp. 104–17. For Georgian examples, see Eastmond, 1998, figs 8, 10, 12–14. For examples from Byzantium, see Evans and Wixom, 1997, cat. nos 138, 140, 144, 1471.

³⁴ According to Vardan, 'Immediately they summoned the exiled Gagik, gave him the crown, and married him to Katramide, daughter of Sahak king of Siunik'; Thomson, 1989, p. 189.

³⁵ N. Marr, the supervising archaeologist, suggested that the sculpture was originally located on the north façade of the church; Marr, 2001, pp. 115–20; Cuneo and Alpago-Novello, 1984, pp. 92–3.

³⁶ A fragment of the upper torso of the statue was recently discovered in a field, and is now in the regional museum in Erzerum. I thank Peter Kuniholm for this information; I have not been able to either see the fragment or obtain an image of it.

3.4 Gagik I
Bagratuni, Church
of St Gregory the
Illuminator, Ani



height.³⁷ The king's royal status was prominently conveyed by a turban of immense proportions, painted white. The statue also featured an undecorated mantle, painted red, worn over a painted white tunic. A carved necklace bearing a large cross rested on Gagik's chest. The tunic's sleeves projected beyond those of the mantle and terminated in great swags of fabric, analogous to (but larger than) those worn by Gagik's brothers at Haghbat.

While the evidence is both quantitatively and chronologically limited, the portraits of Haghbat and Ani suggest a standard representation of Bagratuni royal status which features the presentation of church models, turbans as indicators of royal rank, and mantles worn over tunics distinguished by pendant sleeves. It is only the last of these features which is apparently unique to Bagratid portraits.³⁸ Representations of donors with church models appear in Armenia as early as the sixth century, and their reoccurrence throughout the medieval period confirms that they were an established element in the Armenian representation of aristocratic and royal piety.³⁹ Contemporary Georgian portraits invariably depict donors with church models, and thus attest to a wider, shared tradition of representation.⁴⁰ Turbans, while more restricted in their chronological occurrence, indicate status in Armenian, Georgian and Byzantine art. They signal the royal status of biblical figures carved on the exterior of the palace church of Gagik Artsruni (915–21).⁴¹ The portrait of the Georgian prince Ashot Kuhki (r. 891–918), now in the Tbilisi Museum, features a large turban (Figure 3.5).⁴² Donor portraits in Cappadocia and Constantinople also testify to the Byzantine use of turbans as indicators of status and rank.⁴³ The turbans worn by the Bagratuni kings at Haghbat and Ani should not therefore be read as foreign elements, but rather reflect the thorough assimilation of foreign modes of dress by the Armenian aristocracy.⁴⁴

³⁷ Marr, 2001, p. 116.

³⁸ The sleeves have formal counterparts only in the depictions of sleeve-dancers of the Islamic courts. However, the latter are always shown unfurled and extended over the hands, rather than gathered at the wrists as in the Armenian portraits. I thank Scott Redford for this observation. Baggy sleeves are part of the royal costume on the Spanish-Umayyad Pyxis of al-Mughira, dated to 968, but their form does not duplicate those found in the Bagratuni images; see Dodds, ed., 1992, pp. 193–7. Gagik I's distinctive spit curl, which curves on his cheek, is also found in Abbasid, Fatimid and Hispano-Umayyad paintings. For examples, see Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1994, figs 107, 143–4, 189, 191. This must reflect the general transmission of style from the Islamic courts to the Armenian; it may also reflect the Armenian use of Islamic, or Islamic-trained, artists.

³⁹ The sixth-century example is on a stele found at Agarak, illustrated in Der Manuelian, 1984. In his portrait on the west façade of his palace church (built 915–21), Gagik Artsruni proffers a prominent model of his church to the figure of Christ. For this image, and for the development of the Artsrunik' visual expression of kingship, see below.

⁴⁰ For parallel examples of the use of this iconography in Georgian portraiture, see Eastmond, 1998, *passim*.

⁴¹ If J.-M. Thierry is correct in identifying the fresco portraits at St John of Kaputkol as representations of later Artsrunik' kings, we then see the continuation of this artistic tradition into the eleventh century; Thierry, 1989, pp. 319–21. Certainly, the existing comparanda suggests that, like their late tenth-century counterparts, the lost portraits of the earliest Bagratuni kings of Armenia could also have featured turbans as a sign of royal rank.

⁴² Eastmond, 1998, pp. 11–12, figs 2, 3. For Ashot Kuhki, see Toumanoff, 1961, 'Bagratids', where he is listed as No. 19, Ashot the Immature.

⁴³ The donor depicted with the archangel Michael at Cavusin (963–69) wears a turban; Jolivet-Lévy, 1991, pp. 15–21. In Carikli Kilise, Goreme (1050–1100), the superior status of the donor Theognotos is conveyed, in part, by his turban; idem, 1998, pp. 301–31.

⁴⁴ For the use of 'Islamic' dress in Georgian royal portraiture, see above, note 41, and below, note 67. For a discussion of the parallel contemporary and later use of such 'Islamic' dress in Byzantium, see Mango, 1981, pp. 48–57, esp. 51–2.

3.5 Drawing,
Ashot Kuhki, Tbilisi
Museum

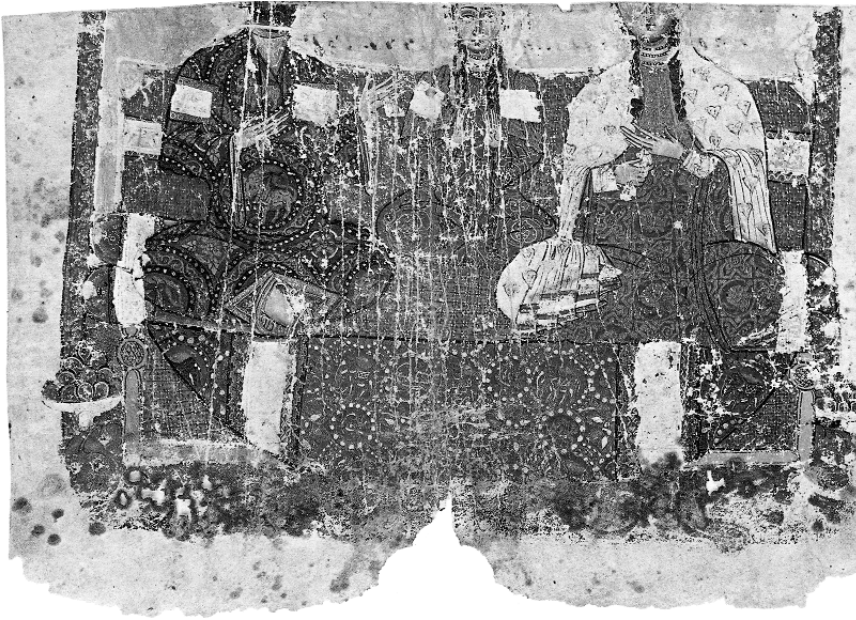


Perhaps as important are the elements that are *not* found in the surviving portraits of Bagratid kings: there are no foreign robes or crowns. While it is possible that the robes worn by the figures at Haghbat were originally embellished with painted decoration, and that they therefore may have imitated either Islamic or Byzantine embroidered textiles, it should be noted that the dress is not Islamic *in form*, as it is in the royal portraits of Gagik Artsruni, for example, who is shown wearing trousers on his palace church at Aght'amar.⁴⁵ Nor do we find Bagratuni kings depicted in *chlamydes* or other imperial regalia, as is found in the Georgian royal imagery at Osk Vank. Indeed, a comparison of the sculptures at Haghbat and Sanahin suggests that what was acceptable for Bagratuni princely imagery was not acceptable for the representation of Bagratuni kings. Once Smbat attained royal status, his portrait no longer features any elements derived from foreign regalia.

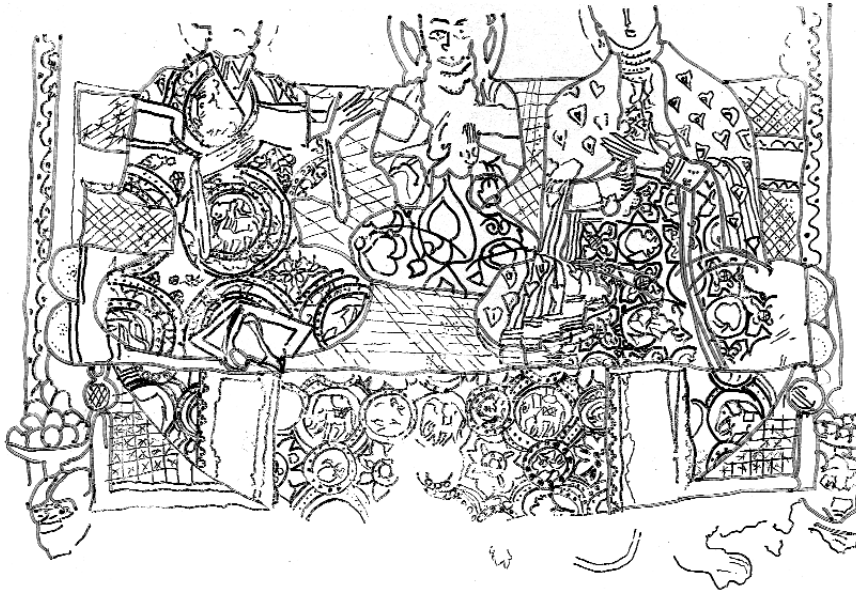
The royal Bagratuni portraits of the second half of the tenth century thus visually stress the specifically Armenian nature of Bagratuni kingship, prominently displaying the rulers' piety and eschewing any foreign emblems of power. This interpretation correlates with the ideology of kingship expressed in the investitures of the first three Bagratuni kings, where the recognition of temporal power symbolized in the Abbasid ceremony or through the gift of an Abbasid crown was secondary to the pious symbolism conveyed through the investiture performed by the catholicos. This shared ideology, as expressed in both ceremonial and portraiture, allows us to postulate that the Bagratuni portraits from the end of the tenth century should be seen as a continuation of an earlier, established tradition of Bagratuni royal imagery of which nothing now survives.

The final Bagratuni royal image dates to the mid-eleventh century, and is the only surviving manuscript portrait of a Bagratuni king (Figures 3.6a and 3.6b). Physically it is unimpressive: a single, badly worn folio which was cut in half and reused as the lining of a binder. It was discovered in 1911 by Bishop Mesrop Nshanean among discarded bindings in the print shop of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The Bishop recorded the incomplete colophon inscribed in two columns on the reverse of the fragment. The first column reads: '... in whom dwells the Holy Spirit of the trinity in his graceful life, filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, with immaculate reputation, erudite, he studied all the Holy Scriptures'. The second reads: 'for the holy

⁴⁵ The likelihood of such painted decoration is diminished by the evidence of the lost statue of Gagik I, which featured a plain red-painted tunic.



3.6a Gagik-Abas Bagratuni with wife, Goranduxt, and daughter, Marem, Gospel of Gagik-Abas



3.6b Drawing, Gagik-Abas Bagratuni with wife, Goranduxt, and daughter, Marem

queen Goranduxt, and for Marem their offspring, that God may grant them to his church for long days, peaceful years, before ...'.⁴⁶

A colophon in the Gospel of Gagik-Abas (Jerusalem 2556, fol. 371v) identifies Goranduxt and Marem as the wife and daughter, respectively, of king Gagik-Abas of Kars.⁴⁷ The Bishop thus correctly concluded that the three figures depicted on the portrait fragment are Gagik-Abas, who ruled from 1029 to 1064 and was the third and final Bagratuni king of Kars, with his wife and child.⁴⁸ This identification led Bishop Nshanean to the conclusion that the portrait was originally part of the Gospel of Gagik-Abas, and it was subsequently bound into that book as fol. 135b, inserted between the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.⁴⁹ This attribution met with general scholarly acceptance until Thomas Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis demonstrated that the page rulings of the portrait fragment and the script and language of its colophon differ from those of the Gospel of Gagik-Abas.⁵⁰ Unquestionably, the portrait was not originally part of the text into which it is now bound. Mathews and Daskalakis suggest that the page was originally from a second manuscript commissioned by Gagik-Abas, most probably also a Gospel, of which nothing now survives.⁵¹

While the colophon inscribed on the back of the damaged folio uses religious language, the portrait itself makes exclusive use of secular imagery, and therefore differs in almost every way from the Bagratuni portraits discussed above. The royal family is shown seated, cross-legged, on a cushioned platform throne that is supported by the figures of lions, such as is found in contemporary representations of Arab rulers.⁵² Bowls of fruit are placed to either side of the throne, which is covered with a textile richly decorated with pearl-edged medallions containing the figures of elephants.⁵³ The cushions behind the three figures are covered with a brilliant red textile which is embellished with *tiraz*, bands of cloth inscribed with honorifics and distributed by Islamic courts in acknowledgment of rank and status.⁵⁴

Each of the three figures suffered various degrees of decapitation when the page was cut in half. Gagik-Abas retains only his bearded lower jaw, the very tip of his nose and a small portion of his right earlobe. The queen's face is less truncated, ending directly below the eyes; she retains her blushing cheeks,

⁴⁶ Nshanean, 1911, pp. 683–7 (in Armenian); translation in Mathews and Daskalakis, 1997, pp. 475–84.

⁴⁷ S. Der Nersessian, 1984, pp. 85–107.

⁴⁸ Gagik/Abas was the grandson of Musegh, brother of Ashot III; Der Nersessian, 1984, pp. 85–107.

⁴⁹ Der Nersessian accepted the attribution of the page, dated the Gospel to the latter part of Gagik-Abas' reign, and assigned the same date to the newly discovered family portrait. She suggested that the miniature was originally located at the end of the Gospel of John, and that originally similar royal portraits were placed at the end of each of the four gospels; Der Nersessian, 1984, pp. 86, 89.

⁵⁰ Mathews and Daskalakis, 1997, pp. 475–7. This conclusion was also more briefly presented in Mathews, 1994, p. 62.

⁵¹ Mathews and Daskalakis, 1997, pp. 76–7.

⁵² Noted by Der Nersessian, 1984, p. 90. Mathews and Daskalakis, 1997, pp. 78–9, incorrectly claim that the lion throne 'has never been remarked'.

⁵³ A late Sasanian/early Islamic ewer in the Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC is decorated with the figures of dancers, one of whom holds a bowl of fruit seemingly identical to that represented on the Bagratid portrait fragment; illustrated and discussed in Gunter and Jett, 1992, pp. 198–201.

⁵⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. *Tiraz*. For *tiraz* in Spanish-Umayyad art, see Dodds, ed., 1992, pp. 105, 109, 218, 224, 226, 270.

small red mouth and the golden pendant in her right ear.⁵⁵ The face of the princess Marem is the best preserved of the three; only the portion above her eyebrows is missing. Like her mother, Marem has rosy cheeks and delicately delineated features, and the women also share the same hairstyle of long braids.

The family wear elaborate costumes, appropriate to their royal status.⁵⁶ The king, seated to the viewer's left, is dressed in a purple and blue tunic decorated with pearls arranged in medallions, each of which contains at its centre the image of a horned ibex carrying a three-lobed leaf in its mouth. The tunic's upper arms are further embellished with *tiraz*, and the hem is turned back to reveal a lining of blue embroidered with gold, the lower edge of the king's trousers and one brown-shod foot.⁵⁷ Goranduxt, to the far right, wears a crimson tunic patterned with greenish-gold alternating motifs of birds inside eight-pointed stars and floral polygons. A white veil decorated with golden heart-shaped leaves is draped over her shoulders, and white cuffs embroidered with gold emerge from her tunic. She wears a blue and red bracelet on her left wrist, and three strands of pearls encircle her neck. The princess, seated between her parents, wears a red tunic adorned with blue-grey palmettes. Her shoulders are draped with a short blue scarf decorated with *tiraz*. Like her mother, she wears three strands of pearls.

Mathews and Daskalakis argue convincingly that the image functions as a presentation of Marem as her fathers' official heir.⁵⁸ They note that her significance is conveyed by the *tiraz* on her tunic, by her central placement, and by the gestures of the three figures. It is most unfortunate that the mutilation of the page removed any evidence of royal headgear. However, the gold background retains traces of haloes that once surrounded the heads of all three figures, and this too must have originally signalled Marem's importance. While there are no surviving Bagratuni painted portraits with which to compare this page, a portrait of the royal Cilician family preserved in the Gospel of Queen Keran, dated to 1272, grants haloes to the king and queen, but not to their children.⁵⁹

Undoubtedly, the primary message of this image is the transmission of legitimate power from the king to his daughter. Yet a comparison of the presentation of the king and queen suggests an important, and previously overlooked, aspect of this painting. Gagik-Abas's left hand is held away from

⁵⁵ The paint where a left earring would have originally been depicted is worn away; one can reasonably assume that she was originally portrayed with a complete set of jewelry.

⁵⁶ The identification of Armenian- versus Islamic-produced textiles is a subject in need of further study. Medieval Armenia was famous for its textiles, which were in great demand in Arab countries. For discussion and bibliography of Armenian textile production, see Ter-Ghewondyan, 1984, pp. 204–5, 206–7.

⁵⁷ The feet of both women remain modestly tucked out of sight. Gagik-Abas' posture, of crossed legs with one foot visible, is found in art produced throughout the medieval eastern Mediterranean. A second, earlier Armenian example is the east façade portrait of Gagik Artsruni, discussed below. A tenth-century Abbasid example, the medallion depicting the caliph al-Moqtadir (Figure 4.6), is discussed in Bahrami, 1952, pp. 5–20. For Spanish-Umayyad examples, see Dodds, ed. 1992, pp. 197, 199. For Georgian examples, see Eastmond, 1998, p. 92, fig. 53. For a modified example from Byzantium, see the Darmstadt casket, Evans and Wixom, 1997, p. 227 fig. 151b

⁵⁸ Mathews and Daskalakis, 1997, pp. 475–84.

⁵⁹ Jerusalem, Armenian Catholicosate no. 2563, fol. 380; colour image in Der Nersessian, 1978, pl. 107.

his body, and the twisting posture suggested by this gesture is reflected in the king's shoulders; the right is higher than the left. And while the paint on the upper edge of the page is badly worn, the king's right earlobe – but not his left – is visible, suggesting that originally his head was also turned toward Maren. In contrast, Goranduxt's hands are held in front of her chest, slightly to the left of the vertical axis of her body. This frontal posture is also reflected in the set of her shoulders. The position of her nose, directly on a line with the vertical axis, confirms that originally her face was also frontal. Not only is she rendered with greater frontality than her higher-ranking spouse, she is also larger.⁶⁰ Her placement on the right-hand side of the composition may also signal her prominence if we consider the hierarchy of placement exhibited by the sculptures at Haghbat, which placed the figure of king Smbat II to the right of his younger brother.⁶¹ And the object she holds in her right hand – possibly a rolled scroll – may also have conveyed her prominence to a contemporary viewer.⁶²

There is a reasonable explanation for the preferential treatment given the figure of the queen: it was she, and not Gagik-Abas, who commissioned the manuscript in which the portrait originally appeared. If this suggestion is accepted, it renders the fragment all the more precious, as it is the sole unequivocal example of female royal patronage to survive from Bagratuni Armenia.⁶³ The message of political legitimacy and succession conveyed by the imagery also suggests that the queen was publicly involved with matters of the utmost political consequence.⁶⁴

A firm dating of the page could further our knowledge, but it is likely to remain circumstantial. According to general scholarly opinion it was most likely produced after Gagik assumed the title of *shahanshah* in 1045 but before the 1054 assault on Kars by the Seljuk sultan Tughrul.⁶⁵ In fact, the *tiraz* worn by the king may suggest a later date. According to Matthew of Edessa, Gagik-Abas arranged a subterfuge to rid himself of Alp Arslan, brother and successor of Tughrul. Gagik-Abas received the sultan's envoy seated upon a black-cushioned throne and dressed in black garments, explaining that he was in mourning for the recently deceased Tughrul. Intrigued, in 1063 Alp Arslan paid Gagik-Abas a visit, accompanied by 'his whole army'. He

⁶⁰ Her figure is significantly wider than the king's across the shoulders and knees.

⁶¹ Later Cilician portraits which depict both a king and queen invariably place the king to viewer's left, as is seen in the Bagratuni portrait, but in the Cilician examples this placement is attributable in each case to the presence of the figure of Christ – the king is placed on Christ's right, or favoured, side. This placement is also found in the depiction of non-royal Cilician donors. For royal examples, see Der Nersessian, 1987, fig. 107; for non-royal, see *ibid.*, fig. 117.

⁶² The roughly contemporary image of Zoë and Constantine IX Monomachos in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul depicts the royal couple flanking the enthroned Christ. Zoë holds a rolled scroll in her hands, a document recording her generous gifts. The images later erected in the same gallery by Alexios and Irene Komnenos show the empress holding a similar scroll; illustrations and discussion in Oikonomides, 1978.

⁶³ The churches dedicated by Ashot and his wife demonstrate that Armenian noble women were active donors, as does the colophon from the so-called Queen Milk'e Gospel, discussed below.

⁶⁴ The study of women and their patronage in the medieval Caucasus has only recently attracted the attention of scholars in the field. It is the author's plan to address this lacuna in the future with an examination of the patronage and representation of women in medieval Armenia, Georgia and Caucasian Albania.

⁶⁵ Der Nersessian, 1984, pp. 86–7; Mathews and Daskalakis, 1997, p. 477.

invested the king in royal robes, and was in turned feted by Gagik-Abas with a banquet of roast lamb.⁶⁶ While it cannot be confirmed that the robes worn by Gagik-Abas in his portrait are those that were presented to him by Alp Arslan, there is also nothing to deny such an identification, and the possible date of production of this work should therefore be extended to 1063.

Whatever its date, the miniature documents the existence of a secular expression of Bagratuni kingship which fully incorporated Islamic courtly iconography. But does this painting reflect recent artistic developments – perhaps related to the dissolution of the Bagratuni kingdom or to outside influence – or is it an example of an alternate tradition of Armenian royal representation which coexisted with that developed by the Bagratuni kings? Again, the lack of comparative imagery makes it difficult to answer this question definitively. We have seen that while the representations of the Bagratuni kings of Armenia do not incorporate elements of foreign regalia, such elements are present in the images of Bagratuni princes, as is seen at Haghbat. Such incorporation is also found in the wider Caucasian tradition of royal representation, as is demonstrated by the royal Bagrationi portraits at Osk Vank.⁶⁷ The tenth-century portraits of Gagik Artsruni on his palace church also appropriate and adapt Islamic courtly iconography in a manner paralleling that seen in the portrait of Gagik-Abas and his family.⁶⁸ Collectively, these examples suggest the existence of a second, and I suggest secondary, tradition of Bagratuni royal representation that incorporated elements of Islamic iconography.

The future of the royal Bagratuni house of Kars differed from that expressed with such elegance in the portrait page; Marem did not succeed her father. In 1064 Ani fell to the Seljuks, and soon thereafter Gagik-Abas sold his lands to Byzantium and emigrated to Cappadocia. By the early twelfth century, the displaced dynasties of Armenia disappear from the historic record. The Armenian kings of Cilicia who rose to power in the following century were influenced by Crusader and Byzantine art and protocol, and developed their own unique expressions of rulership.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, p. 104.

⁶⁷ For the use of 'Islamic' iconography in Georgian imagery, see Eastmond, 1998, pp. 91–2, 110.

⁶⁸ Discussed below.

⁶⁹ Evans, 2001, pp. 243–58.

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Artsrunik' royal portraits: the palace and the palace church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar

When we turn to examine the visual expression of kingship employed by the Artsrunik', we find two surviving contemporary images and one description of a lost portrait – and all are, or were, depictions of Gagik Artsruni. In the early tenth century, shortly after his investiture as king of Vaspurakan by the caliph, Gagik sought a fitting site upon which to construct a new royal city. He chose a small island in Lake Van (now eastern Turkey) which offered superior defensive capabilities, a reliable freshwater spring, and the beauty appropriate for a royal setting (Figure 4.1). The planning and building of 'the splendid, famous, and stupendous city of Aght'amar' are described in *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'*.¹ According to the anonymous continuator, Gagik first secured the harbour and fortified the island with massive walls. He then directed the construction of princely residences, terraced gardens, and parks filled with trees and flowers. The centrepiece of the city was the royal palace, which 'appeared from all sides of the province as a great hill in the middle of the city'.² The palace church, dedicated to the Holy Cross, faced the north façade of the palace.³

We begin with the palace. While the building itself no longer exists, according to *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, it was so lavishly decorated that a viewer attempting to examine just one section of the dome would be utterly overwhelmed.⁴ Prominently featured among the visual splendours were multiple depictions of Gagik. He was shown seated on gilt thrones, flanked by princely attendants, lines of musicians, 'women dancing in an admirable manner', men engaged in swordplay and wrestling matches, and by lions and other wild beasts and birds.⁵ The continuator rather thriftily sums up these myriad splendours: 'if anyone wished to enumerate all the works of art in the palace, it would be a great labour for himself and his audience'.⁶

There are no similar surviving representations of Armenian kings, nor are there any descriptions of lost Armenian royal imagery that parallel this description. There are also no parallels with contemporary Byzantine imperial art. The description of Gagik's palace portraits does evoke the iconography of the Islamic cycle of princely entertainments, which features an enthroned king flanked by attendants and animals traditionally associated with royalty, and

¹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 292–6; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 354–8.

² Artsruni, 1991, p. 296; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 358.

³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 297–9; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 360–61; J.-M. Thierry, 1989, pp. 272–3.

⁴ Artsruni, 1991, p. 295; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 357.

⁵ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 295–6; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 357–8.

⁶ Artsruni, 1991, p. 296; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 358.

4.1 General view, Aght'amar Island and the Church of the Holy Cross, Lake Van



frequently includes musicians, dancers, and contests of strength.⁷ Examples roughly contemporary with Aght'amar survive from the Abbasid capitals of Samarra and Baghdad and from the court of the Spanish Umayyad caliph.⁸

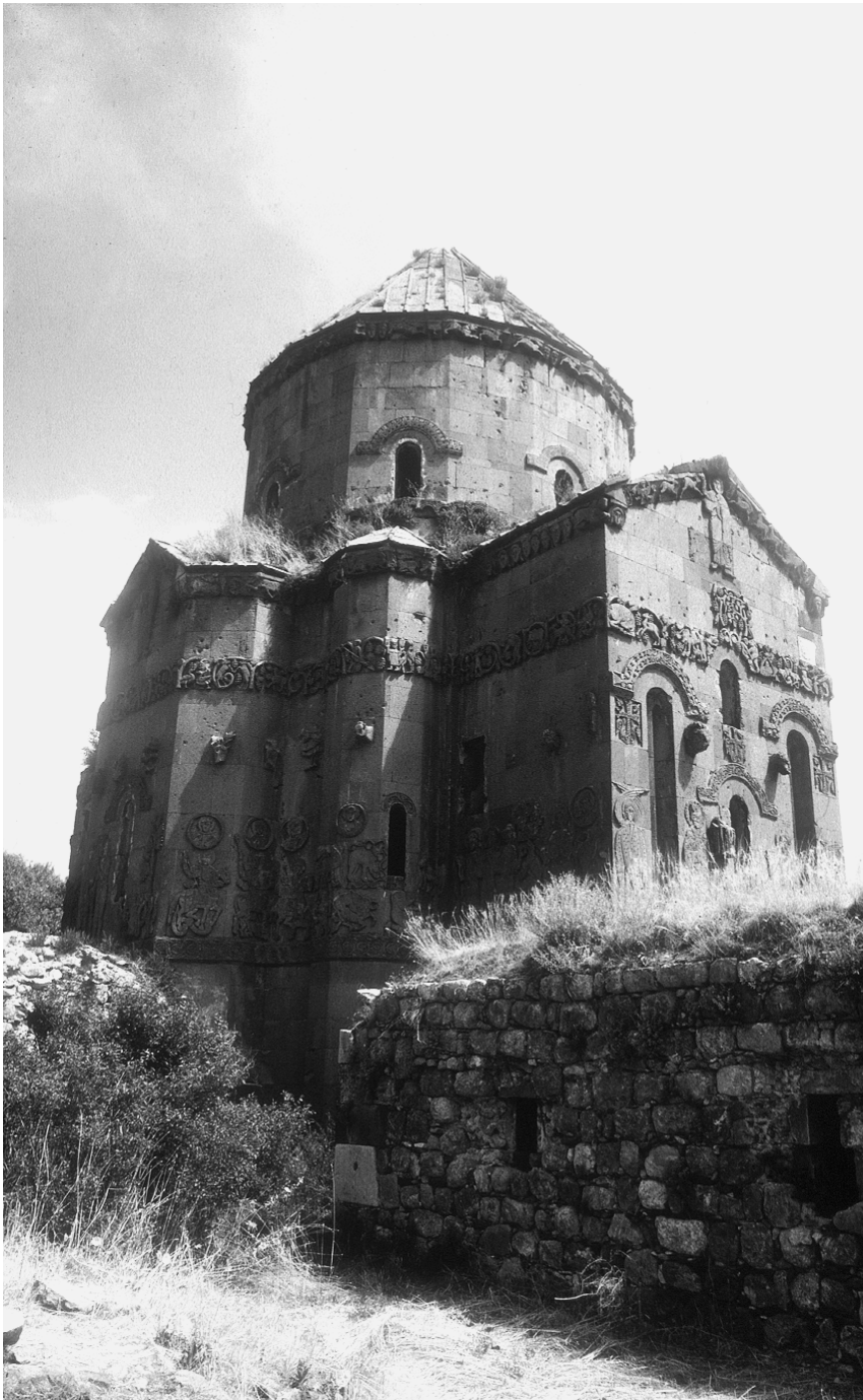
Further evidence of this suggested emulation of Islamic iconography is found on the exterior of the Church of the Holy Cross, which is all that remains of Gagik Artsrunik's tenth-century city of Aght'amar.⁹ The central-planned church is best known for its extensive sculptural programme – over two hundred remarkably well-preserved figures carved in low relief decorate the exterior (Figure 4.2).

A frieze of running animals encircles the exterior of the dome, while arches carved with pomegranates emphasize the windows in the drum of the dome. A second frieze, composed of animals and human faces, stretches across the roof line, encircling the church. It is broken at the four peaks of the gables, interrupted by the full-figure images of the Evangelists. Beneath the Evangelists' feet is a third frieze of animals and humans which begins on the west façade and wraps the building. Below this is the row of animal heads,

⁷ For examples of this iconography, see Arnold and Grohmann, 1929, p. 10; Sourdel-Thomine and Spuler, ed., 1973, p. 267, figs 204c, 205a; Pauty, 1931, pp. 49–50, pl. XLVII–LVIII. For this iconography in a Christian context, see de Villard, 1950, and Tronzo, 1997, pp. 57–62.

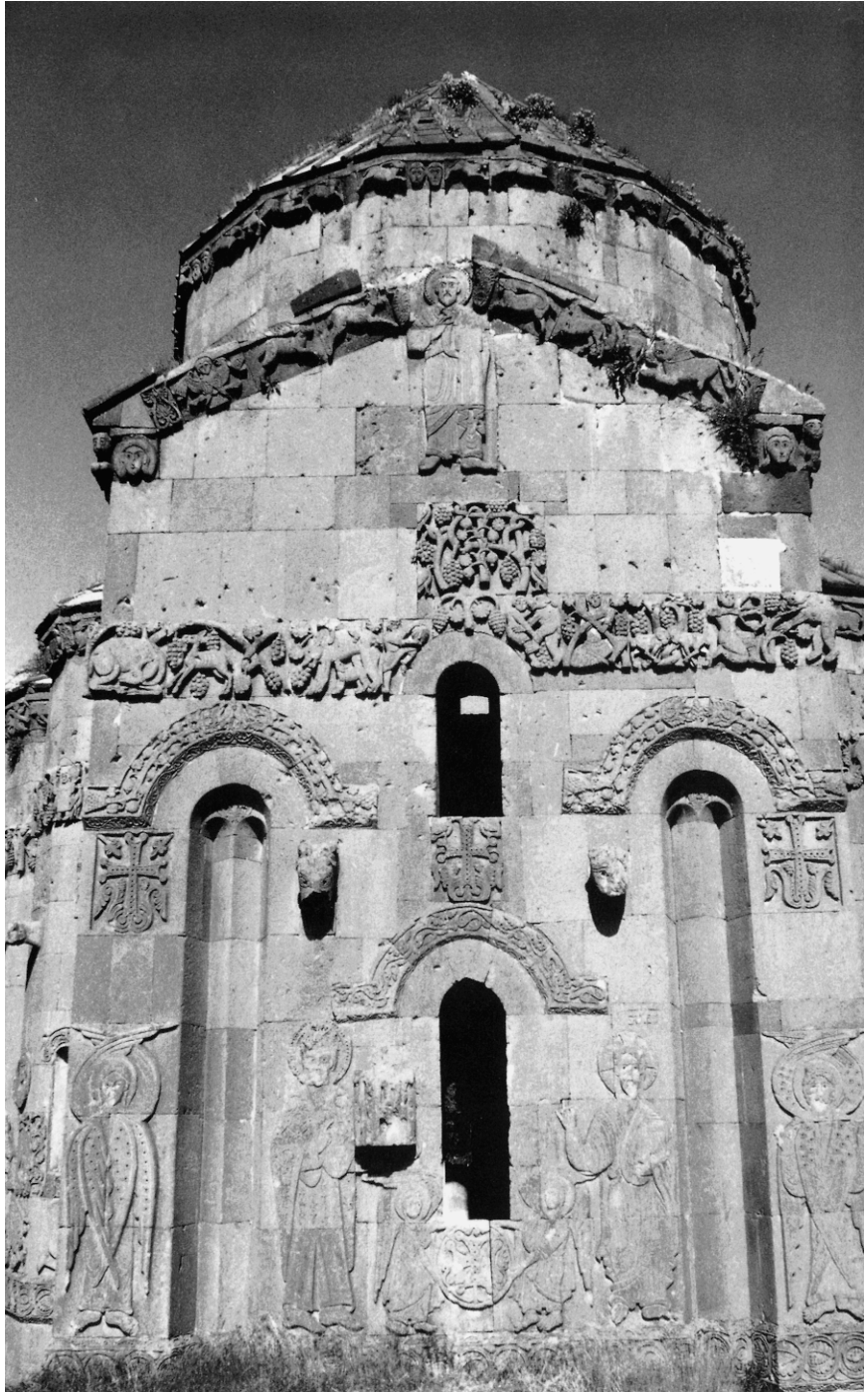
⁸ For Islamic minor arts, see above, Chapter 3, note 57; for palaces, see Herzfeld, 1927, p. 38, fig. 23. For Hispano-Umayyad examples and bibliography, see Dodds, ed., 1992, pp. 41–7.

⁹ Two subsidiary chapels were added to the northeast of the church some time after the early fourteenth century, and the southern bell tower and the western chapel were added in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. For discussion of these later additions, see Der Nersessian, 1965, pp. 9–10. The island of Aght'amar is now an open-air museum administered by the Turkish government.



4.2 Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar from the southeast

4.3 West façade,
Church of the Holy
Cross, Aght'amar



animals in profile and animal protomes which begins and ends on the east façade, on either side of a portrait of Adam. Beneath this row is the main figural frieze, approximately 3 metres above the current ground level (Figure 4.3). The animal and human figures carved here stand on or slightly above a ground line carved with lotus flowers and pomegranates; this vegetation also decorates the arches of the lower windows of the church.

Although the Church of the Holy Cross has suffered increased incidents of vandalism in recent years, the exterior remains relatively complete.¹⁰ A few of the figures even retain the cut, coloured stones which defined their eyes; originally, the church must have been a breathtaking sight.

The interior is much less well preserved; a partial collapse of the roof has resulted in significant damage to the interior decorative program (Figure 4.4). Still, it retains two fresco cycles: one circling the drum of the dome and one circling the lower walls of the church. As one of only a few surviving medieval palace churches east of Constantinople, the Church of the Holy Cross is a rich source of information for the study of royal iconography.¹¹ When the exterior and interior decorative programmes are analysed in the context of the church's palatine function, it can be demonstrated that they were designed to convey a unified royal message through the repeated associations of the same elements. I suggest, however, that the church's decorative programme functions primarily to establish Gagik's piety, employing iconography that stresses the orthodox nature of his rule.

We begin with the exterior sculptural programme. The east façade features a portrait of a ruler, and while various identities have been proposed for this figure, I suggest that it can only represent Gagik Artsruni (Figure 4.5).¹² The presentation of this ruler not only corresponds to the textual descriptions of Gagik's palace portraits, but as we shall see, it also corresponds to Gagik's presentation elsewhere on the church. Gagik, then, is shown haloed and crowned, sitting cross-legged on a cushioned platform throne, wearing a loose, undecorated tunic belted over trousers. He reaches with his left hand to pluck from a cluster of grapes, and raises a glass with his right hand. He is flanked by two attendants in princely dress, and by a lion and eagle.

A comparison of this portrait with a medallion issued by the reigning Abbasid caliph, al-Moqtadir, reveals the extent of Islamic influence on Gagik's portrait (Figure 4.6). On the obverse of the medallion the caliph is shown

¹⁰ While the church is relatively protected by its island location – it lies approximately two miles offshore – in recent years the two small angels holding between them a medallion decorated with the cross, carved beneath the central window of the west façade, were partially cut out. Most other acts of vandalism have been restricted to the row of projecting animal heads. The defacement of the figures of Eve, on the north façade, apparently took place in the nineteenth century, while the island housed an Armenian monastery.

¹¹ A palace church in Ani, built in the early seventh century and reconstructed in the late ninth to early tenth centuries, was once rich in sculptural decoration but is now in ruins. A second palace at Ani, the so-called 'palace of the Baron', was probably home to the wealthy thirteenth-century merchant Tigran Honants; for both, see Marr, 2001, pp. 125–32. The tenth- or eleventh-century fortress of Amberd contains the ruins of a palace, see Tokarskij and Alpago-Novello, ed., 1972. A very summary review of existing Armenian palaces is given by Baboukhanian, 1984, pp. 47–55.

¹² The image was tentatively identified as Gagik by Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 25, and her suggestion was followed by Mnats'akanian, 1986, p. 34. Otto-Dorn, 1961/62, p. 19, suggested the image depicts the caliph al-Moqtadir; Davies, 1991, p. 81, identified it as the Armenian king Trdat.

4.4 Interior,
Church of the Holy
Cross, Aght'amar



seated cross-legged on a cushioned platform throne, raising a glass to chest-level.¹³

The west façade of the Church of the Holy Cross features a second portrait of Gagik, carved at a monumental scale (Figure 4.7).¹⁴ Here Gagik is haloed and wears a jewelled crown and a richly embroidered mantle over a tunic and trousers. He holds in his outstretched hand a model of the church that he proffers to the figure

of Christ. This feature, which is also found in Byzantine imagery, has led scholars to suggest that Gagik's portrait emulates depictions of Byzantine emperors, but I know of no surviving representations of living middle Byzantine emperors that use such iconography.¹⁵

As noted above, the presentation of a church model first appears in Armenia donor portraits of the sixth century, and its consistent use in Armenia throughout the medieval period demonstrates that it was fully incorporated into the Armenian tradition of royal and aristocratic patronage. Its presence in medieval Georgian portraits further attests to its establishment in the wider Caucasian artistic tradition. Certainly, Gagik's image differs from contemporary Byzantine imperial portraits in almost every aspect. Gagik defers physically to Christ only with his feet, and he is significantly larger than Christ. In Byzantine art, emperors defer to Christ by turning, bending or bowing, and while they, like Gagik, are frequently much better dressed than



4.5 Detail, Gagik Artsruni, east façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Agh'amar



4.6 Silver medallion of caliph al-Moqtadir

¹³ Sourdel-Thomine and Spuler, 1973, pl. 155a.

¹⁴ The image is over 2.5 metres high.

¹⁵ Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 30; Davies, 1991, p. 121.

4.7 Gagik Artsruni presenting his church to Christ, west façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



Christ, they are never larger.¹⁶ Although there are no surviving contemporary Armenian works with which to compare Gagik's portrait, the west portal of the cathedral at Mren (c. 640) features sculptures of Christ flanked by Saints Peter and Paul and by two donors who are taller than the holy figures, suggesting that this use of scale was established in Armenia before the Arab invasions.¹⁷ Parallels are also found in Georgian art, where royal imagery typically includes the presentation of church models. The portrait group from Osk Vank, discussed above and dated to 963–66, also features the same seeming discrepancy of scale. Here the two brothers and founders present models of their church to the central, smaller figures of the Deesis.¹⁸ While comparanda are limited, these examples suggest that Gagik's portrait follows an established Caucasian tradition of royal imagery and is only distantly related to Byzantine imperial representation.

On one level, Gagik's image is a straightforward representation of his piety as donor. However, I suggest that this image served primarily to convey Gagik's power through the employment of Islamic courtly iconography. The particular form of Gagik's mantle and crown does not occur elsewhere in surviving art, and the mantle's decorative motif of small, plump birds with short, thick beaks is not repeated elsewhere in the church's sculptural programme (Figure 4.8). This led Der Nersessian to suggest that the sculpture represents specific Islamic regalia presented to Gagik by the caliph or the ostikan.¹⁹ Certainly, this is possible; the contemporary histories document that before construction on the church was completed Gagik received at least three crowns and many embroidered robes from Islamic authorities.²⁰ Yet regardless of whether Gagik's crown and robe represent specific Islamic regalia, the sculpture does show him wearing identifiably Islamic costume, and thus displays the source of his authority and asserts his legitimacy.

A more direct appropriation of Islamic court iconography is employed on the vine frieze carved above the images of Gagik and Christ. As noted above, this frieze begins and ends on the west façade, wrapping around the building. Only on the west façade is it divided into two equal segments (Figures 4.3 and 4.9). Above Gagik's portrait and to the left we see a doe accompanied by her fawn, a bear nursing one cub while another rides upon her back, and a man tugging a large pumpkin from the vine. These scenes are peaceful and even playful, emphasizing abundance, maternal protection and nurturing, and the peaceful coexistence of humans and animals. They contrast sharply with the scenes to the right, positioned above the figure of Christ. Here we see a man attacked by a bear, a man pulling two stout branches across his body, two

¹⁶ An example is the ivory panel which depicts Christ crowning Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos (r. 945–59), now in the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. While the figures of the emperor and Christ are the same size, Constantine's image is placed lower in the picture plane, giving the impression that he is smaller. No such spatial manipulation is employed at Agh'amar or in the Georgian examples; colour image in Evans and Wixom, ed., 1997, p. 203.

¹⁷ J.-M. and N. Thierry, 1971, pp. 43–78.

¹⁸ The presentation of a church model is also seen in a roughly contemporary panel originally from Opiza and now in Tbilisi. For discussion and bibliography on both Opiza and Osk Vank, see Eastmond, 1998, pp. 17–19, 222–4; 21–3, 228–30, figs 12–14.

¹⁹ Der Nersessian, 1965, pp. 30–31.

²⁰ Artsruni, 1985, pp. 347–9; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 163–4, 208.

4.8 Detail, Gagik Artsruni, west façade, church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar





4.9 Vine scroll, west façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

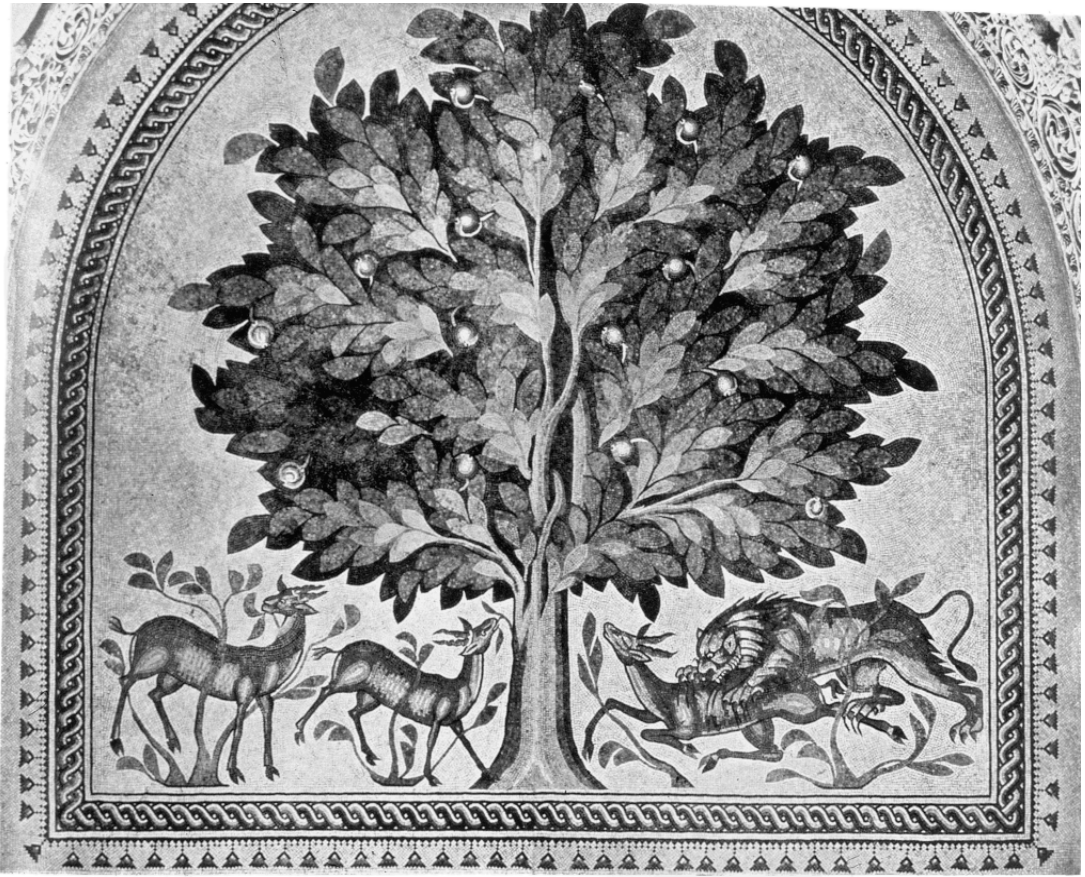
curly-horned rams engaged in a ferocious head-butting contest, and a kneeling man shooting arrows at a bear. The clear division between the gentle, bucolic scenes on the left and the contrasting, violent side of nature on the right is not found elsewhere on the church, confirming that the division of scenes on the west façade was deliberate.

Juxtapositions of the peaceful and savage sides of nature are present in the courtly arts of both Byzantium and Islam. In Byzantium, such juxtapositions are found in imperial encomia that use animal imagery to characterize and celebrate imperial power; they are also seen in palace art.²¹ Yet any similarity with Aght'amar is general rather than specific: none of the Byzantine examples include representations of the current emperor. More importantly, none visually stress a clear division between peaceful and savage scenes, as is found at Aght'amar. Such clear visual divisions are a component of Islamic courtly art, where the iconography served to celebrate the beneficent reign of the caliph and his ability to protect his realm. The most famous example is an eighth-century floor mosaic from a private audience hall at Khirbat al-Mafjar (Figure 4.10). The mosaic depicts a central fruit tree, with two gazelles peacefully grazing to the left and a lion attacking a gazelle to the right. The scene is oriented to face the petitioner standing before the seated prince, and served to characterize the nature of Islamic rule.²²

Just as the Khirbat al-Mafjar mosaic functioned in conjunction with the physical presence of a ruler, it may be suggested that the sculpted vine frieze on the west façade of the Church of the Holy Cross functions in visual

²¹ For the use of such *topoi* in imperial rhetoric, see Maguire, 1990a, pp. 210–11; Jenkins, 1966/94, pp. 70, 293; Theodore Daphnopates, 1978, pp. 149–53, esp. 152. For the juxtapositioning of peaceful and savage animals in early Byzantine palace art, see Trilling, 1989, pp. 54–69; Mango, 1991, p. 327; Magdalino, 1988, pp. 101–2, 106–7.

²² Ettinghausen, 1972, pp. 43–5. The iconography of a second palace mosaic has been similarly explained by Bisheh, 1993, pp. 49–56, fig. 8, and Piccirillo, 1986, pp. 131–2, fig. 98. A possible later example is a tent created for the Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawlah and described by the poet Mutannabi. The tent was made for the emir's reception following his capture of a Byzantine fortress; its interior featured a central depiction of the emperor paying homage to the prince surrounded by images of wild and tame animals. While it is not stated that these animals were iconographically separated into peaceful and savage scenes, the evidence of other such examples of Islamic expressions of power used in similar contexts to convey similar messages strongly suggests the possibility. The *History of the House of the Artsrunik'* documents two meetings between Gagik and Sayf al-Dawlah in 940, well after the construction on Aght'amar was completed. This Islamic tent cannot therefore be a source of inspiration for Gagik's church decoration, but rather suggests the currency of the image in the Islamic and Islamic-dominated world; discussion and bibliography in Golombek, 1988, p. 31.



4.10 Mosaic floor, audience hall, Khirbat al-Mafjar, Jordan

combination with the portrait of Gagik beneath it. Gagik is represented symbolically as the ruler of a peaceful and prosperous land, and as a powerful defender of that land against enemies. This message is strengthened by the positioning of the peaceful, bucolic scenes above the image of the king.

One further presentation of Gagik may be suggested. The south facade of the church faced the royal palace, contained the main entrance to the church and, on a second level, the doorway into the royal gallery.²³ Yet despite these obvious royal associations, the façade does not display a portrait of the king. While the sculpture surrounding the entrance into the royal gallery is now largely concealed by a bell tower added in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, the later structure is free-standing, and not flush with the church façade, enabling a determined and limber viewer to gain partial glimpses of some of the concealed images. The gallery door is flanked by the confronted figures of a boar to the left and a lion to the right. Both are shown with

²³ Artsruni, 1991, p. 298; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 361.

lowered heads – their snouts touch the door frame.²⁴ By means of their placement and orientation, these animals drew attention to the doorway, and thus, I suggest, to the person of the king when he was present.

If we envision Gagik clothed in Islamic-bestowed regalia in the door of his royal gallery, grant him a modest accompaniment of princely relatives or courtiers, and add to this mental picture the carved animals flanking the door, we are presented with a tableau which duplicates the iconographical elements of the east façade, where Gagik is flanked by princely attendants and animals indicative of royal status. These presentations of Gagik also parallel the description of his palace portraits, and confirm that the decorative programmes of the palace and palace church were linked by their presentations of Gagik as a powerful ruler. They demonstrate that Islam provided the paradigm for the visual expression of Artsruni power.

Gagik began construction on the Church of the Holy Cross in 915 – less than one year after the violent death of his uncle and former king, Smbat I.²⁵ In order to understand the context of the decorative programme of Gagik's palatine church, we must return once more to the historical narrative. As we have seen, in 895/96 the Bagratuni king Smbat I and his Artsrunik' nephews undertook a series of successful military alliances, culminating in the defeat of the rebellious Kaysite emir. As a reward for his service, Smbat presented Ashot Artsruni with the important centre of Nakhchavan. The ostikan Afshin was readying a massive retaliatory attack when he died in 901, and his brother Yusuf was appointed to succeed him, a transition that granted a relative, if temporary, peace to Armenia.²⁶ In 903 a dispute erupted between Ashot Artsruni and his kinsman Hasan over the possession of a strategic fortress. Smbat dispatched John Catholicos to negotiate a peaceful settlement. The catholicos extracted a solemn oath from Ashot to release Hasan unharmed, but Ashot disregarded his vow and had Hasan blinded. The catholicos promptly excommunicated Ashot, and the prince died one year later, in 904.²⁷ Gagik Artsruni succeeded his brother as prince of Vaspurakan. Smbat, unsure of Artsrunik' loyalty, took Nakhchavan from them and restored it to the prince of Siunik'.²⁸

²⁴ Because of the later addition of the bell tower, the sculptures are presently very difficult to view. Fortunately, the tower is an independent structure not connected to the church. My personal observations agree with those of Orbeli, 1968. For an English summary of Orbeli's findings and a rather fanciful reconstruction drawing, see Mnats'akanian, 1986, pp. 29–30. Davies, 1991, pp. 49–50, figs 7–8, interpreted the animals without giving consideration to the palatine function of the church. Lalayan, 1910, p. 200, identified them as a lion and tiger; the latter animal is, to my knowledge, not part of the iconography of medieval Armenian art.

²⁵ Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 5.

²⁶ For Afshin's death, see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 153; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 241–43; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 304–5. Before his death, Afshin had negotiated marriage to Smbat's niece as a condition for the release of captive members of the royal household; see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 147–9. For Yusuf's succession to his brother's position, see Artsruni, 1991, p. 283; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 345, Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 155.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–5. The Artsrunik' historians conceal the excommunication. Thomas Artsruni notes only that before he died, Ashot repented of his sins and undoubtedly received forgiveness; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 248–51; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 310–13. His anonymous continuator takes pains to distance Gagik from the act that led to his brother's excommunication; Artsruni, 1991, p. 276; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 339.

²⁸ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 162–3, and Maksoudian's comments, *ibid.*, 288 n. 3; Ter-Ghewondyan, 1976, pp. 67, 72–73.

In 908 the ostikan Yusuf openly rebelled against Baghdad. The caliph ordered Smbat to provide military assistance in suppressing the ostikan, and Yusuf yielded in the face of the superior force. While Smbat had successfully avoided a major armed conflict, the subsequent reconciliation between the caliph and ostikan forced him to provide each with the full amount of yearly tribute. Many *nakharars*, unable or unwilling to contribute the requested one-fifth of their possessions, sought to depose the king.²⁹ Gagik Artsruni offered Smbat his loyal support – if the city of Nakhchavan was returned to Artsrunik' control. When Smbat refused, Gagik travelled to Azerbaijan and sought the ostikan's aid in reclaiming the disputed territory. Yusuf not only promised his assistance, he crowned Gagik king of Vaspurakan. Concerned that Yusuf could now enlist the support of the formidable Vaspurakan army, Smbat sent the catholicos to Azerbaijan to negotiate a peaceful settlement. In response, Yusuf imprisoned the catholicos, summoned Gagik to his court and crowned him king a second time.³⁰

The military action foreseen by Smbat was not long in coming. In 909/910 Gagik allied his army with the ostikan's and led the combined force in a campaign which first captured Nakhchavan and then seized Bagratuni capital of Duin, forcing the king to flee.³¹ When Smbat returned to Duin with his army in the spring of 911, the ostikan again placed his troops under Gagik's command. By the end of the campaign, most of the Bagratuni nobility, including Smbat's youngest son, had been captured. The prisoners were turned over to the ostikan, who had them poisoned. According to the history written by the catholicos, Gagik, overcome with remorse at the death and destruction, fled the ostikan.³²

Gagik's withdrawal did nothing to aid Smbat, whom Yusuf had trapped in a mountain fortress. The king turned for assistance first to the caliph in Baghdad and then to the emperor in Constantinople, but both courts were embroiled in crises, and no help was forthcoming.³³ Smbat submitted to Yusuf's terms, hoping to bring an end to the slaughter and destruction, and was allowed to return to Duin. The respite was brief. In 913 Yusuf again stormed Duin; this time he took Smbat prisoner. Smbat remained at Duin until 914, when Yusuf, unable to take the Bagratuni fortress of Ernjak, had

²⁹ According to the catholicos, Smbat planned to pay the double tribute for one year only, hoping that this might placate the caliph and ostikan, and that a new tax could then be negotiated. Disgruntled *nakharars* plotted to assassinate Smbat; when the attempt failed, Smbat blinded those responsible and sent some to the king of Egrisi and some to the Byzantine emperor; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 160–62, 288 n. 26; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 284–5; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 347.

³⁰ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 163–5. These events are presented very differently in Artsruni, 1991, pp. 284–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 347–9. Here the chronology is manipulated and Gagik is first crowned in 913/14, when Smbat was already Yusuf's prisoner. This presentation of events fits the function of the book, which was to extol Gagik's reign, and which therefore could not portray either his collusion with the ostikan or his attempt to usurp his uncle's throne. For the same reason, the imprisonment of the catholicos is also omitted.

³¹ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 164–5. The unfortunate catholicos was taken on campaign, in fetters, by Yusuf. He was subsequently imprisoned in Duin until 910, when he purchased his freedom; *ibid.*, p. 166.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 167–73.

³³ The caliph was occupied with the Fatimid rebellion in Egypt. The emperor Leo VI died while making plans to send troops to Smbat's aid. The succession of Leo's brother Alexander created great turmoil in the capital, and ensured that Smbat would receive no Byzantine aid; *ibid.*, p. 174, and Maksoudian's comments, *ibid.*, p. 293 nn. 5–7.

Smbat brought to that city and tortured before the walls, hoping to persuade those inside to surrender. When they remained steadfast, Yusuf ordered the king's death by decapitation. Smbat's headless corpse was then returned to Duin, where it was nailed to a cross and displayed on the city walls.³⁴

With the Bagratuni king dead and the succession of Smbat's son Ashot II contested by the ostikan, Gagik was the dominant Armenian power. His piety, however, had been severely compromised by his collusion with Yusuf. In contrast, while Bagratuni secular power was shattered, their pious prestige was boosted to new heights by Smbat's martyrdom.³⁵ Gagik could not rest on the laurels of his family's pious reputation. His father and grandfather had converted to the Muslim faith while imprisoned in the caliphal city of Samarra, and as we have seen, more recent damage to Artsrunik' piety had been inflicted by Gagik's elder brother, who was excommunicated by the catholicos. While it was important that Gagik be perceived as a powerful ruler, I suggest that in order to maintain stable rule, it was equally important that he establish, or re-establish, his pious persona, and that this need determined the particular iconography of piety chosen for the Church of the Holy Cross.

The royal presence and the Christological cycle

We turn next to the interior of the Church of the Holy Cross. It features two surviving fresco cycles, one in the drum of the central dome, and one wrapping the lower walls; both date from the time of the construction of the building.³⁶ The scenes of the lower cycle depict events from the life of Christ; it is the best-preserved medieval Armenian Christological cycle and one of the earliest to survive east of Constantinople (Figure 4.12). Der Nersessian demonstrated that the Christological cycle at Aght'amar was not slavishly copied from the earlier-established Byzantine model, but was altered to accommodate the Armenian doctrine.³⁷ Unlike its Byzantine counterpart, the fresco cycle at Aght'amar does not include depictions of apocryphal episodes or images of the Last Supper, the Descent from the Cross or Christ's burial. Miracles are also de-emphasized at Aght'amar; only the Raising of Lazarus and the Wedding at Cana are represented. Instead, particular emphasis is given to the Resurrection of Christ, which is represented by three scenes: the Holy Women at the Sepulchre, the Anastasis, and Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene. The Aght'amar cycle also includes a rare depiction of the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177. The Artsruni historians do not, for obvious reasons, mention Smbat's death; for his capture 'like a weak child', see Artsruni, 1991, p. 285; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 347.

³⁵ According to Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 177, the site where Smbat's corpse had been crucified and set on display was illuminated by a divine light, and miraculous cures were effected by soil which had been saturated with the king's blood.

³⁶ The figure types are replicated in the exterior sculpture and interior frescoes; compare, for instance, the figure of Adam on the north façade with the images of Adam painted in the fresco cycle of the drum of the dome (Figures 4.23 and 4.17b). Of scholars studying the church, only one has suggested the interior frescoes are not contemporary: Grishin, 1985, pp. 39–52.

³⁷ Der Nersessian, 1965.



4.11 View of Royal Gallery with scenes of the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

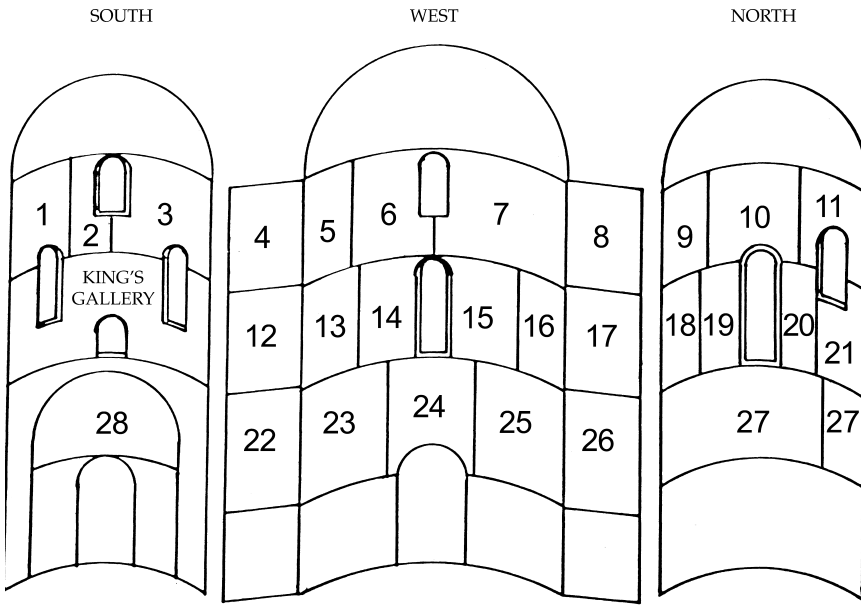
Anointing of Christ at Bethany, which is paired with a depiction of the Washing of Christ's Feet. As Der Nersessian noted, this presentation reflects contemporary Armenian liturgical practice. On Maundy Thursday, bishops or priests symbolically anointed and washed the feet of clerics while reciting a prayer in which the anointment of Christ's feet was recalled.³⁸ Further modifications are found on the upper register of the north wall, which depicts the Baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, and the Wedding at Cana. As Thomas Mathews has demonstrated, in Byzantine exegesis the Wedding at Cana is interpreted as a validation of the sacrament of marriage and as a warning for sobriety.³⁹ In contrast, Armenian exegetes interpreted Christ's first miracle as a figuration of the Eucharist. By moving the Wedding at Cana from its proper chronological position, which would place it before the representation of the Baptism, and placing it as a theophanic pendant to the Baptism, the artists at Aght'amar emphasize the revelation of Christ's divinity.⁴⁰

It is not only the content of the Christological cycle which has been altered in comparison with the Byzantine model; the orientation of the cycle within the building is unique, and therefore of particular interest. The narrative cycle

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁹ Mathews and Sanjian, 1991, pp. 147–9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*



4.12 Orientation of lower fresco cycle, south wall, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

Key: 1 Annunciation, 2 Visitation, 3 Nativity, 4 Presentation of Christ to Symeon and Anna, 5 Joseph's Dream, 6 Flight to Egypt, 7 Massacre of the Innocents, 8 Mourning Mothers, 9 Baptism of Christ, 10 Transfiguration, 11 Marriage at Cana, 12 Healing of the Blind Man, 13 Raising of Lazarus, 14 Entry in to Jerusalem, 15 Anointing at Bethany, 16 Washing of the Feet, 17 Christ before Pilate, 18 Crucifixion, 19 Two Marys at the Tomb, 20 Anastasis, 21 Appearance to the two Marys, 22 Doubting Thomas, 23 Ascension, 24 lost scene, 25 Pentecost, 26 lost scene, 27 lost scenes, 28 Second Coming



4.13 Second Coming of Christ, south conch, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

begins in the upper reaches of the south apse, above the royal gallery, with depictions of the Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity (Figure 4.11).

The scenes of the first two registers proceed from left to right, wrapping around the interior of the church. The second register skips over the royal gallery, which is not decorated with figural scenes, but is painted in imitation of hanging fabrics with richly jewelled borders. The third and lowest register of the cycle ends with the depiction of the Second Coming of Christ in the conch above the main door, directly beneath the king's gallery (Figures 4.12

and 4.13).⁴¹ The unusual orientation of this cycle can be attributed to the presence of the royal gallery. The scenes are arranged so that the king was effectively bracketed by them, enclosed within a narrative cycle that began above his head and ended below his feet. This orientation, and the painted backdrop of the gallery which focused attention on the king, suggests that Gagik, when present, was himself incorporated into the decorative programme.⁴²

The scenes which appeared above Gagik's head as he was seated in his gallery and those which were presented for his view on the opposite wall support this suggestion, for they have a long history of royal associations. The scenes above the royal gallery – the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity, which at Aght'amar includes the arrival of the three Magi – depict the recognition of one chosen by God. The proximity of these scenes to the king imply that Gagik too was chosen, and indirectly attribute his kingship to divine will. As the king was himself an element of the message, the visual presentation of Gagik in juxtaposition with the surrounding Christological scenes was clearly intended for viewing by those in the naos of the church.

In contrast, the frescoes of the north wall, opposite the royal gallery, were intended for Gagik's view. The upper register depicts the Baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, and the Wedding at Cana, while the lower register displays the Crucifixion, the Holy Women at the Tomb, the Anastasis, and the Appearance in the Garden. Of the three scenes of the upper register, the Transfiguration is given the most prominence; it is the largest, and it is centred in the upper register, directly above a window.

Other medieval examples confirm the association of the Transfiguration and Baptism with royal portraits or as the object of the royal view. In the ninth-century Byzantine Khludov Psalter, now in the Moscow Historical Museum, an image of the Transfiguration faces an image of the Anointing of David, a visual *topos* of the divine election of a Christian ruler.⁴³ A second Byzantine comparison may be found in the north tribune of the gallery at Hagia Sophia. The vault has lost most of its decoration, but the original inclusion of the Baptism of Christ on the eastern end is well documented, and it has been proposed that its lost mosaic counterpart in the western section of the vault depicted the Transfiguration of Christ.⁴⁴ Beneath this suggested Transfiguration is the mosaic portrait of the emperor Alexander (912–13). The same emperor is paired with the Baptism of Christ on a gold solidus which depicts Alexander receiving a crown from John the Baptist; the figure of the emperor thus replaces the figure of Christ in the standard iconography of the Baptism.⁴⁵ This coin presents the most explicit surviving statement of the

⁴¹ The scene of the Last Judgment is usually placed on the west wall in Armenian churches; an example roughly contemporary with Aght'amar is the church of Tat'ev on the island of Siunik', dated to 930; Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 36.

⁴² Jones, 1993; idem, 1994; Jolivet-Lévy, 1997, pp. 231–46.

⁴³ Moscow, Hist. Mus. gr. 129D.

⁴⁴ Jolivet-Lévy, 1987, pp. 441–70.

⁴⁵ Maguire, 1990b, pp. 217–31, esp. 226–7. For the definitive identification of John the Baptist, see Jolivet-Lévy, 1987, pp. 447–8, figs 3–4.

symbolic interpretation of the Baptism as an archetype of the divine investiture of an emperor, and was struck two years before construction began on the Church of the Holy Cross (Figure 4.14).

A different version of the visual coupling of a royal portrait with theophanic imagery is found in the rock-cut church of Cavusin, in Cappadocia. The church, which dates to 963–69, features portraits of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas and his family painted in a northeast niche. Directly opposite the imperial portraits, as if presented for their view, is the depiction of the Baptism of Christ.⁴⁶

Two later examples demonstrate that such associations were not limited to Byzantium, but gained a wider currency. The Georgian church of Macxvariši is dated by inscription to 1140. It features a depiction of King Demet' re I being simultaneously blessed by Christ, crowned by the archangel Gabriel, and presented with a sword and belt by two regional governors.⁴⁷ Directly above this royal panel is an image of the Transfiguration, which is the largest of the Christological scenes in the church. A presentation of theophanic scenes similar to that at Aght' amar is also found at the Capella Palatina in Palermo. Like the scenes at the Church of the Holy Cross, those of the Capella Palatina were presented as the focus of the royal view. Built by the Siculo-Norman kings Roger II and William I during the years 1143–66, the Capella Palatina originally featured a royal gallery from which the ruler viewed, among other images, a centrally placed image of the Transfiguration, flanked by the Baptism of Christ to the left and the Raising of Lazarus to the right.⁴⁸

These examples confirm the established association of the revelation of Christ's divinity, as expressed by the Transfiguration and the Baptism, with the selection and recognition of temporal rulers. The orientation of the Christological cycle at Aght' amar in reference to the royal presence should not therefore be seen as an anomaly. It is rather a reflection of a visual expression of pious rulership which had wide currency in Byzantium.



4.14 Gold solidus, Emperor Alexander and John the Baptist, c. 912–13

⁴⁶ Jolivet-Lévy, 1982, pp. 73–7; idem, 1987, pp. 447–8.

⁴⁷ Eastmond, 1998, pp. 73–4; pl. XI shows this image before restoration; for a line drawing of the entire wall, see *ibid.*, fig. 46.

⁴⁸ Originally, the royal gallery in Palermo faced depictions of several scenes, including the Nativity, Flight into Egypt, Baptism of Christ, Raising of Lazarus, and the Entry into Jerusalem, which were symmetrically arranged around a central depiction of the Transfiguration; Ćurčić, 1987, pp. 125–44; Johnson, 1994, pp. 118–31; Tronzo, 1997, esp. pp. 54–6.

The king of Paradise and the king of Vaspurakan

The visual expression of pious rulership conveyed in the interior frescoes of the Church of the Holy Cross was, however, manipulated to convey a message specific to Gagik's rule. To appreciate this, we now turn from the lower wall cycle to the cycle of frescoes in the drum of the dome (Figure 4.18). Although these frescoes are very poorly preserved with little of the paint remaining, there is general scholarly agreement concerning the scenes depicted.⁴⁹ The drum cycle portrays events from the book of Genesis, beginning with a depiction of the creation of Adam, followed by Adam in the garden of Eden, the creation of Eve, and a partially preserved scene which is identified below as God giving Adam dominion over the animals. This is followed by a blank space that originally contained three or perhaps four scenes, then depictions of the reproach of God, the expulsion, and the Seraph guarding Paradise (Figures 4.15 and 4.16). The actions of each scene are either contained within the spaces between the alternating windows and niches of the drum, or take place across these architectural elements.

Two peculiarities confirm that the drum cycle, like the lower wall cycle, is keyed to the royal gallery in the south apse. First, the creation of Adam, the initial scene in the cycle, was not placed where we would expect to find it,

4.15 Drawing, expulsion from Paradise, Genesis cycle, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



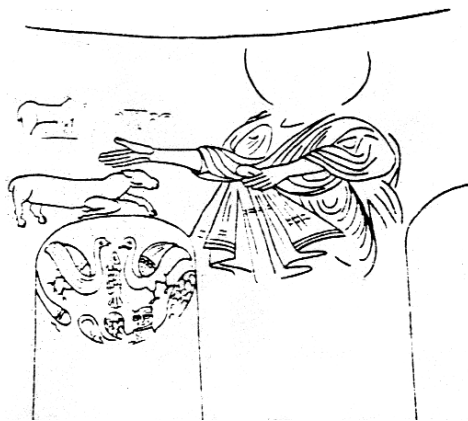
4.16 Drawing, seraph guarding Paradise, Genesis cycle, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



directly above the eastern apse. It was instead shifted to the northeast, with the figures of the Creator and Adam arranged on either side of the niche to the left of the apse.⁵⁰ The second peculiarity of the cycle is evident in the section that stretches from the northeast to the south apse (Figure 4.18). This part of the drum cycle is above the royal gallery, and here the scenes are presented out of their chronological order. The scenes in this section depict the creation of Adam, Adam in Paradise, the creation of Eve, God giving Adam dominion over the animals, and one lost scene. According to the biblical account,

⁴⁹ For excellent photographs and line drawings of all of the frescoes, see N. Thierry, 1983.

⁵⁰ This detail has been previously noted only by Jolivet-Lévy, 1981, p. 88. She does not, however, comment on its significance.



4.17 Drawing, God giving Adam dominion over the animals, Genesis cycle, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

the Creation of Eve occurred after God gave Adam dominion over the animals; if the scenes in the drum cycle followed the proper chronological sequence, the Creation of Eve would have been located directly above the royal gallery. This scene was instead placed immediately to the east of the gallery, and this manipulation, I suggest, permitted the placement of two symbolically significant scenes directly above the king's gallery.

The first of these scenes depicts God giving Adam dominion over the animals; the second scene has been lost. In the depiction of God giving Adam dominion over the animals, the figure of God fills the space between the drum niche and the window (Figure 4.17).⁵¹

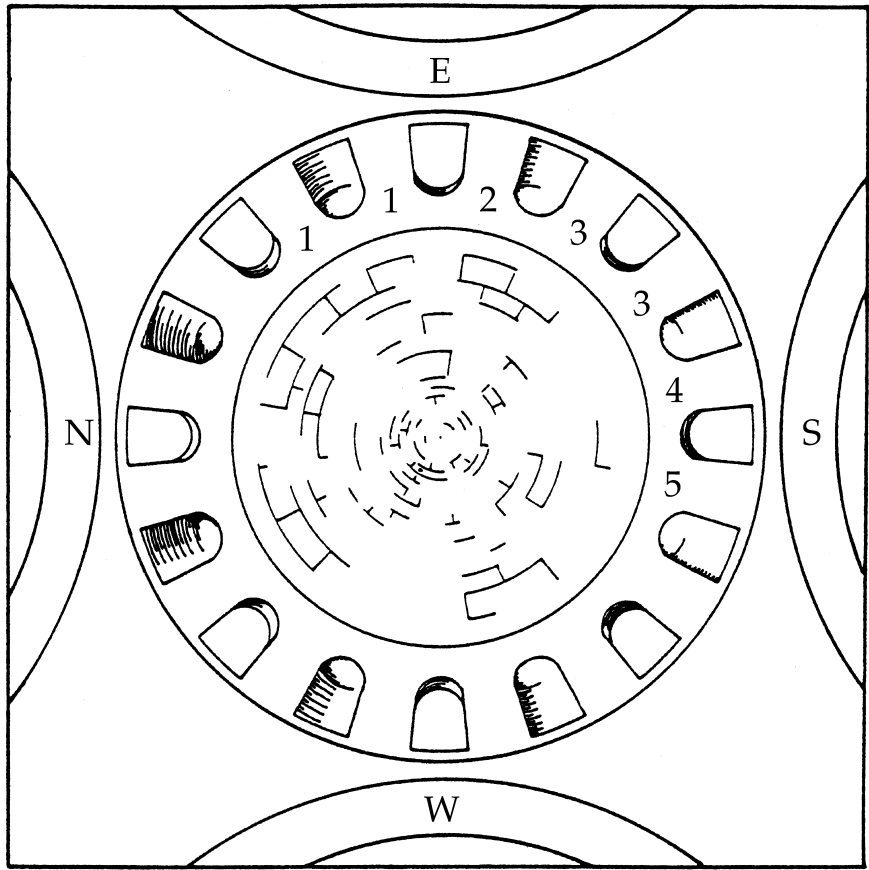
God gestures to the viewer's left, where small hoofed animals are depicted above the niche; within the niche are images of paired birds and fish. God's gesture indicates that this is not a scene intended to stand alone. He is calling attention to the animals, but to whom is his gesture directed? What was originally represented in the second space above the royal gallery, to the right of the figure of God?⁵² An answer is suggested by the scenes once found in the fifth-century Cotton Genesis and now preserved in the Creation cupola in the atrium of San Marco in Venice.⁵³ Here we find the following order: the animation of Adam, Adam in Paradise, the naming of the animals, and the creation of Eve. In the Creation cupola, the episodes of God granting Adam dominion and of Adam naming the animals are conflated, and the narrative moves from the figure of God, at the left, to the right, where Adam names the

⁵¹ Mathews, 1982, p. 247, identifies this figure as an angel who witnesses the creation of Eve. In this identification, Mathews does not take into consideration the adjacent birds and animals, to which the figure gestures, and which I argue belong to the depiction of God Giving Adam Power Over the Animals.

⁵² Davies, 1991, p. 151, suggests that the missing scenes represented 'Eve being tempted by the Serpent; Adam and Eve eat the Forbidden Fruit; Adam and Eve dressed in "aprons"; the Divine Summons; God's Cross-examination and Curse'; N. Thierry, 1983, p. 310, suggests that three or four scenes are missing; she proposes a subject for only one, the Creation of the Animals. Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 37, suggests three scenes are missing: God presenting Eve to Adam, Eve Tempted by the Serpent, and Adam and Eve Tasting of the Fruit.

⁵³ For the Cotton Genesis, see Tikkanen, 1889; Weitzmann and Kessler, 1986, esp. pp. 16–29; Lowden, 1992, pp. 40–53. For the church and mosaics at San Marco, see Demus, 1984; for the Creation cycle in particular, see Jolly, 1997.

4.18 Drawing, reconstruction of Genesis cycle, drum fresco, northeast to south apse, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Creation of Adam | 2. Adam in Paradise |
| 3. Creation of Eve | 4. God grants power to Adam |
| 5. Lost Scene | |

animals. The placement of God and the direction of his movement in the San Marco cupola duplicate the presentation of the same elements in the Aght'amar drum cycle, and suggest that the next scene in the sequence at the Church of the Holy Cross would be Adam naming the animals (Figure 4.18).

In this suggested reconstruction, scenes depicting God giving Adam dominion over the animals and Adam naming the animals were originally placed above the royal gallery at the Church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar. The first of these scenes emphasizes the divine establishment of Adam's power, while the second emphasizes Adam's wise execution of this power, and the resultant peace and concord in his kingdom. Their proximity to the king's gallery would have suggested to the viewer a parallel between the king of Paradise and the king of Vaspurakan. This parallel was emphasized by the sculpture of the gallery balustrade. The balustrade itself no longer survives, but photographs taken before its destruction document its appearance (Figure 4.19). The balustrade was decorated with animal-head protomes representing



4.19 Photograph of balustrade of Royal Gallery taken in 1930s, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

a cross-section of the animal population: an ox, antelope, lion, ram, elephant, and a calf.⁵⁴ The diversity of the animals represented indicates that this cannot simply be interpreted as an allusion to the king's royal power, as would be expressed, for example, by lions' heads alone. All were sculpted as if emerging from a background of intertwined grape vines and pomegranates, vegetation that further conveyed a sense of paradise.⁵⁵

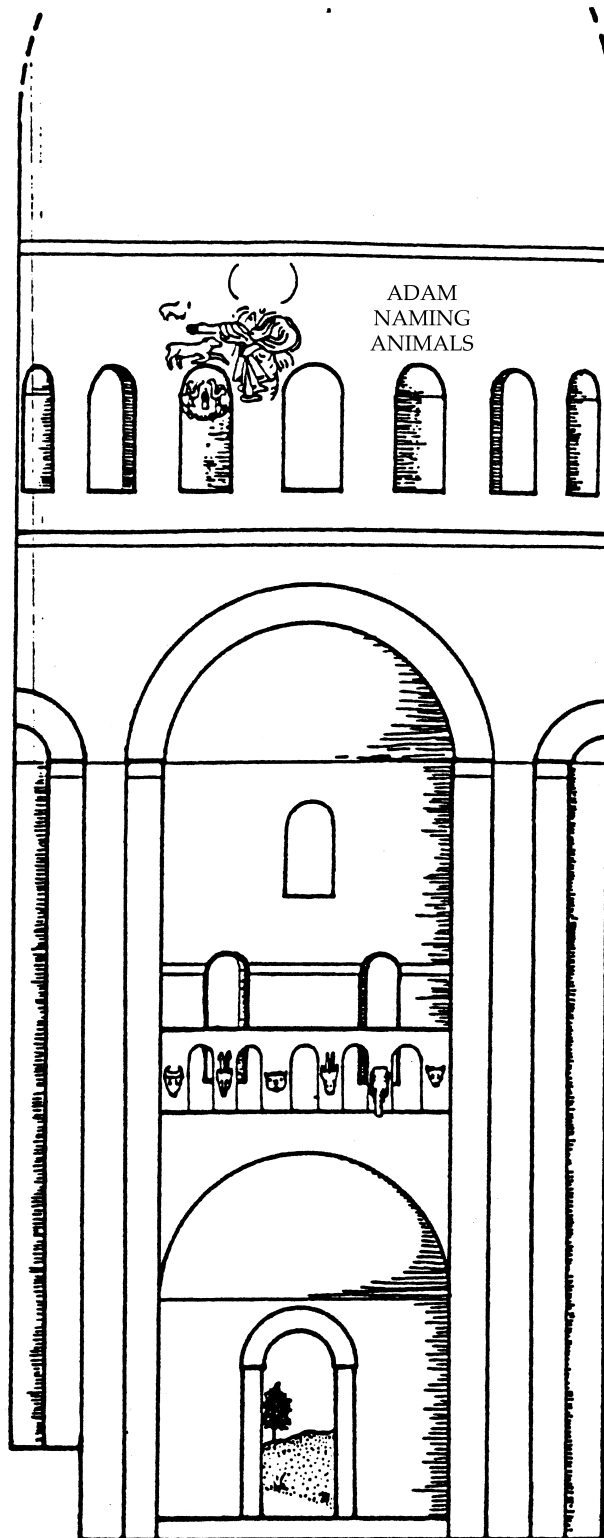
According to this reconstruction, members of Gagik's court assembled in the naos of his palatine church would have looked up to see their king enthroned in his royal gallery, framed by the lower fresco cycle, behind a balustrade of carved animal heads, beneath depictions of God giving Adam dominion over the animals and Adam naming the animals (Figure 4.20). This presentation of Gagik compares him with Adam, ruler of Paradise, a comparison which characterizes the nature of Gagik's kingship, stressing his wisdom and authority and implying divine approval of his rule.

The unusual orientation of the Genesis cycle also allowed images depicting the Expulsion from Paradise and the Seraph guarding the gates of Paradise to

⁵⁴ To my knowledge, the only surviving head from the balustrade is the ?antelope head on view in the Van Archaeology museum.

⁵⁵ The carved vine frieze which wraps around the building is also composed of pomegranates and grapevines; this replication between the interior and exterior decorative programmes is, as we shall see, also duplicated by the message of royal piety conveyed on the exterior and interior of the church. On the west façade, the primacy of the Christian message is confirmed by that fact that the portrait of the king, which so carefully copies the iconography of medallion of the caliph, omits the detail of the dagger held in the left hand. This is discussed further below.

4.20 Drawing, reconstruction of view of Royal Gallery, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



be placed directly across from the royal gallery.⁵⁶ This placement, I suggest, continues the association of Gagik and Adam.⁵⁷ In Armenian apocryphal tradition, at the Expulsion the Seraph promised Adam that he would be restored as ruler in Paradise at the time of the Second Coming of Christ.⁵⁸ The two scenes of the upper fresco cycle which were positioned to be most visible from the royal gallery thus depict the consequences of sin, and contain only an implied promise of redemption.⁵⁹

We can now return to the lower wall frescoes, discussed above, which constitute the royal view: the Baptism, Transfiguration, and Wedding at Cana. It has been demonstrated that the Baptism and Transfiguration are found represented with royalty or in visual conjunction with royal images throughout eastern medieval Christendom. It has also been noted that the inclusion of Christ's first miracle, the Wedding at Cana, reflects a specifically Armenian interpretation of this event as a theophany. This does not, however, tell us why these three scenes were chosen for the royal view. Do they, or do they not, comment on or add to the parallels between Adam and Gagik which are outlined above?

I suggest that they do function in the comparison. Thomas Mathews has shown that Armenian biblical commentators, in contrast to their Byzantine counterparts, interpreted each event of the Gospel not only in terms of its immediate action, but also in terms of the preceding causalities and future results.⁶⁰ A depiction of the Transfiguration thus becomes a polyvalent vehicle. Moses and Elijah, by their presence, bear witness that the Christ of the Transfiguration is the divine power they saw in visions. The transfigured Christ, bristling with radiance in a concentrically banded mandorla, was also, for the medieval Armenian viewer, the triumphant Christ of the resurrection, who physically redeems the souls of Adam and Eve – preparatory to restoring Adam to rulership in Paradise. The image of the Transfiguration thus symbolically parallels, on one level of interpretation, the scene of the Second Coming that is painted on the opposite wall, beneath Gagik's feet. The view of the gallery, and of the king when he was present, offered a more explicitly triumphal message. As we have seen, the narrative scenes in the lower wall frescoes recount the life of Christ, and culminate in the depiction of the Second Coming which is placed directly below the royal gallery, and which conveys the fulfilment of the promise of resurrection for the faithful.

In this presentation of Gagik Artsruni seated in his royal gallery, we find parallels with Adam which serve to symbolize his kingship, function as

⁵⁶ There is no scene of the Seraph guarding Paradise in the Creation cupola at San Marco; its inclusion at Aght'amar indicates the specificity with which the programme was planned.

⁵⁷ As is discussed below, these scenes are also directly above the exterior sculptural depictions of the Temptation and Fall, further confirmation of the conscious inter-relation of interior and exterior scenes which relate Adam's story.

⁵⁸ Lipscomb, 1990, p. 141; Stone, ed., 1996, pp. 58–9.

⁵⁹ The drum cycle was not in the line of sight, but above it. In contrast, the Crucifixion is directly opposite the royal gallery, and features a very large head of Adam placed beneath the figure of the crucified Christ. This of course alludes to the belief that Golgotha was the site of the Adam's burial; it also underscores the necessity for Christ's sacrifice, and is discussed further below. The next three scenes, which focus on the Resurrection, foreshadow the promise given to Adam of his restoration in Paradise.

⁶⁰ Mathews, 1982.



4.21 Gagik Artsruni, king of Vaspurakan and Adam as king in Paradise, east façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

reminders of his sins, and offer the promise of his ultimate redemption. These messages are conveyed through a complex interweaving of frescoes, sculpture and the physical presence of the king. Their correct interpretation depends upon the recognition of the specifically Armenian reading of the decorative programme. As discussed above, a similar method of visual expression was used on the exterior of the church to convey Gagik's kingly power. As Gagik stood in the doorway of his royal gallery, his physical presence, royal costume, the adjacent sculpture and the presence of his attendants all combined to convey the desired message.

The visual comparisons of Gagik and Adam are continued in the sculptural programme on the exterior of the church, and it is this theme which unites the interior and exterior decorative programmes. We return to the east façade, where, as we have seen, the iconography of power current in Islam is used to present Gagik as a powerful ruler. Another level of interpretation is offered by the visual conjunction of Gagik's image with the other sculptures of the façade. Directly beneath the representation of Gagik is a second medallion that contains a bust portrait of Adam (Figure 4.21). An inscription carved to the left of Adam's portrait stresses that he is presented as ruler in Paradise: 'and Adam gave names to all the animals and wild beasts'. Further emphasizing this role are the heads of a lion and a bull which flank Adam's portrait, and the animal-heads, animal-head protomes, and animals carved in



4.22 Gagik Artsruni, Adam, peaceful animals, central section of east façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

low relief which extend completely around the building from either side of Adam's image. The vine-frame medallion containing Gagik's image is centred directly above the medallion containing the portrait of Adam. This careful positioning moved both images slightly to the right of the true centre of the façade, a precise placement which confirms that the depiction of Adam was intended to be viewed in conjunction with that of the king directly above it, likening the rule of Gagik to that of Adam in Paradise. In this Christian context, the wine which symbolized courtly pleasures in the Islamic iconography of power now becomes the wine of the sacrament.⁶¹

The sense of Paradise is further reinforced on the façade by the figures of a lion, cheetah and goat which peacefully coexist beneath Adam's portrait (Figure 4.22). The placement on the east façade of the images of Adam, the king and the peaceable animals also reinforces the idea of Paradise. According to tradition, the Garden of Eden was located in the east. The east was also believed to be the direction from which the faithful will witness the Second Coming, at which time Adam will be restored as ruler in Paradise, and at which time the faithful, presumably including Gagik Artsruni, will enter heaven.⁶²

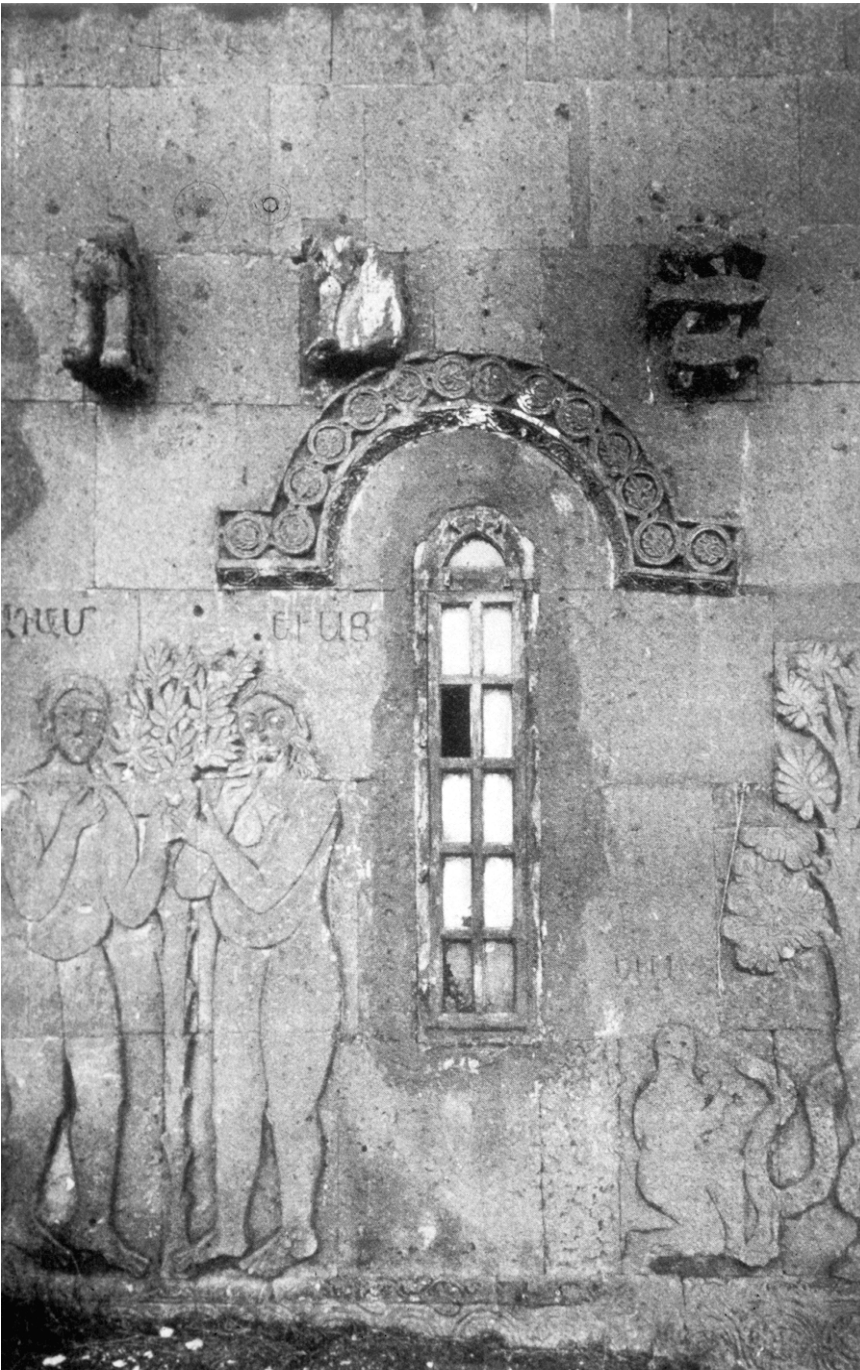
The next suggested component in this thematic linking of Gagik and Adam is more oblique. The central apse of the north façade features depictions of the Temptation of Eve and the Fall (Figure 4.23). Eve is shown to the right of the central window, kneeling before the serpent that stands on short, sturdy legs before a fruit-bearing tree. To the left of the window, Adam and Eve are shown flanking the same tree. Eve offers the fruit to Adam, who raises it to his mouth.⁶³ The north façade was effectively the back of the church; as has been noted, it is the only façade which did not feature either the image or the person of Gagik Artsruni. The linking of the exterior and interior decorative programmes that is evident in the repeated comparisons of Gagik and Adam suggest that the placement of the Temptation and Fall on the exterior of the wall which faces the royal gallery caused these scenes to function in the interior of the church as well, as part of the royal view. From the interior, their message would be felt rather than seen, and the unfavourable comparison of Adam and the king would be at its most indirect. On the exterior of the church, the depictions of the Temptation and the Fall serve as a chronological continuation of Adam's narrative, which began on the east façade with the Naming of the Animals, and which I suggest is concluded on the west façade.

The west façade features the monumental portrait of Gagik Artsruni (Figures 4.3 and 4.7). It has been demonstrated that on one level this portrait combines with the vine frieze above it to present Gagik as a powerful ruler and defender of his kingdom. Another level of interpretation for this portrait group is suggested by the contemporary texts. The *History of the House of the Artsrunik'* contains a description of this portrait which stresses the penitent nature of the image: 'the glorious image of king Gagik ... stands before the

⁶¹ This reading is paralleled by the interior scene of the Wedding at Cana, with its quite similar representation of a royal wedding guest who sits cross-legged and holds a glass of wine raised to his chest.

⁶² Thomson, 1979/94, esp. pp. 110–11.

⁶³ Syriac influence is present in the sequence of the Temptation and Fall, which reads from right to left. For the same 'reversed' style of sculpture, see Eastmond, 1996, pp. 229–33.



4.23 Detail,
Temptation of Eve
and the Fall, central
apse, north façade,
Church of the Holy
Cross, Aght'amar

Lord, depicted as if imploring the remission of his sins. Although there may be words [of blame] in our history, nevertheless the king will not want in claiming the gifts [he seeks], hoping for future restitution.⁶⁴

The reader may well be startled by this description, for at first the passage, with its emphasis on pleading for forgiveness, seems completely at odds with the actual depiction of the king. Gagik as portrayed on the west façade seems anything but penitent; he is significantly taller than Christ, and in his lavishly embroidered garments and bejewelled crown, he is much better dressed. The key to resolving the seeming discrepancy between the appearance of the royal portrait and its description is found in the writings of John Catholicos. According to the catholicos, Gagik's Christian conscience experienced a re-awakening following the murder of his uncle, the Bagratid king Smbat, in 913/14. Gagik, 'feeling remorse in his heart, did penance in accordance with the canons'.⁶⁵ The Armenian Canon of penance requires the penitent to face *west* and publicly renounce his sins.⁶⁶ The placement of Gagik's image on the west façade of the church is unique; no other royal portraits are so placed on Armenian churches constructed after the Arab invasions of the late seventh century.⁶⁷ This placement, when viewed in the context of contemporary events, suggests that on one level the portrait represents Gagik's act of penitence. It is therefore the *location* of the portrait – its placement on the west façade – that allowed the historian to truthfully describe this sculpture as a petition for the remission of sins.

If Gagik's sins are referred to obliquely on this façade, his hoped-for redemption, which is emphasized in the description of his portrait in *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, is given clear expression. Two seraphim flank the figures of Christ and the king (Figure 4.3). These seraphim are, I suggest, the key to the correct interpretation of this portrait group. As we have seen, the Armenian Apocrypha feature a seraph which, at the Expulsion, promised Adam he would be restored as ruler in Paradise; this event is implied in the drum fresco of the Expulsion which is placed opposite and above the king's gallery. Yet, unlike the exclusionary seraph of the interior drum cycle, the flanking seraphim on the west façade are inclusive; they serve to locate the scene in Paradise, and indicate that Gagik's penitence has earned him redemption. The blessing gesture performed by Christ also conveys the certainty of this redemption.

⁶⁴ Artsruni, 1985, pp. 360–61.

⁶⁵ Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 173.

⁶⁶ Conybeare, 1905, pp. 193, 202.

⁶⁷ The only other surviving Armenian royal portrait located on a west façade is found at the church at Mren, which is dated to the first half of the seventh century; Der Manuelian, 1984, pp. 183–4; Thierry and Thierry, 1971, pp. 43–77. The tenth-century portraits of the Bagratid princes at Haghbat and Sanahin are displayed on the east façades, and the statue depicting Gagik I Bagratuni, c. 995–1000, may have been installed on the north façade of the church at Ani; see above, Chapter 3, note 35. There are no parallels with Georgian royal portraits; the portrait of Ashot Kux at the church of Tbet'i, dated to 891–918, was originally on the interior northwestern pillar; Aladashvili, 1977, pl. 71; Beridze et al., 1983, pp. 172, 176; Mepiaschwili and Zinzadse, 1977, p. 223. The church at Dolishane, dated to 954–58, depicts Smbat I on the southeast face of the drum of the cupola; Winfield, 1968, pp. 35–8; pl. 4a–5b. The mid-tenth-century church at Osk Vank contains multiple depictions of its royal founders, located on the southeast exterior wall, an interior southwestern pier, and in the south porch of the church; Winfield, 1968, pp. 38–57; Cuneo, 1971, p. 206; Aladashvili, 1977, pp. 124–5; Djobadze and Hills, 1976, pp. 39–62.



4.24 East façade,
Church of the Holy
Cross, Aght'amar

The west façade therefore presents the final visual association of Gagik and Adam on the palace church, with the king compared to Adam who has been restored as ruler in Paradise after the Second Coming. This comparison is also emphasized by the sculpted heads of a lion and bull which are placed above the portraits of Gagik and Christ; heads of these same animals flank the portrait of Adam on the east façade.⁶⁸

THE MAIN FIGURAL REGISTER OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS: PIOUS
RULERSHIP AND ANCESTRAL PIETY

The main sculptural register of the Church of the Holy Cross features, in addition to the portrait of Gagik Artsruni discussed above, portraits of individual holy figures and biblical narrative scenes. The sculptures of this register continue the message of royal piety conveyed by the king's portraits and by the comparisons of Gagik and Adam. Their focus differs, however, as they stress the piety of the Artsruni and the pious history of Vaspurakan in addition to offering biblical paradigms of good rulers with whom Gagik may be favourably compared.

We begin with the east façade (Figure 4.24). Beneath the portraits of Gagik and Adam are the figures of six holy men whom I identify, from left to right, as John the Baptist, Gregory the Illuminator, the apostle Thaddeus, James of Nisibis, the apostle Bartholomew and the prophet Elijah. Of these six, only John the Baptist, Gregory the Illuminator and the Prophet Elijah are identified by inscription. There have been various identifications proposed for the

⁶⁸ The heads of the so-called animal-head register have been the target of much vandalism; most are now difficult if not impossible to decipher. My identification of the animal heads on the east and west façades reflects the evidence of photographs taken early in the century.

remaining three figures; those which I propose are based on the figures' dress. Thaddeus wears the *sticharion* and *phelonion* appropriate to an apostle, James wears the *omophorion* indicating his status as bishop, and Bartholomew wears the tunic and mantle favoured in representations of saints.⁶⁹

These portraits are arranged thematically, in pairs that are meant to be read from the outer edges of the façade inward.⁷⁰ This pairing is seen first in the depictions of John the Baptist and the prophet Elijah, to the far left and right respectively. These two forerunners of Christ who serve parallel functions in the New and Old Testaments here parallel each other in appearance.⁷¹ Elijah's role as a forerunner of Christ is also emphasized by the figure of the widow of Sarepta kneeling before him; Elijah resurrected her son from the grave.⁷² Elijah and John the Baptist are linked in the Gospel according to John, which begins with the life of the Baptist. According to the biblical account, when people saw John and recognized his holiness, they asked 'Are you Elijah?'⁷³ The placement of the portraits of these two prophets near the edges of the façade and their gestures toward the centre serve to direct the viewer's eye inward to the next pair of sculpted saints. Here are Gregory the Illuminator to the left and the apostle Bartholomew to the right. Gregory baptized the Arsacid king Trdat, who then proclaimed Christianity as the state religion; the saint thus brought the light of faith to the country and 'illuminated' the Armenian people.⁷⁴ According to legend, the Illuminator also constructed several churches in Vaspurakan, including one on Mount Varag.⁷⁵ Gregory's counterpart on the façade, the apostle Bartholomew, was the first bishop of the see later held by Gregory, and he too has a connection with Vaspurakan. According to the historian Moses Khorenats'i, Bartholomew brought a miraculous icon of the Virgin to the monastery of Hogeats' Vank' in Vaspurakan. The icon was believed to have been painted by the apostle John

⁶⁹ While most scholars accept these naming inscriptions as authentic, identification of the remaining three figures varies. Der Nersessian, 1965, pp. 16–17, 20–21 suggested that the figure identified here as St Bartholomew is instead St Thomas, and that the figure kneeling before Elijah is Khuran, ancestor of the Artsrunik'; Van Esbroeck, 1984, p. 173, was the first to propose that the figure identified by Der Nersessian as Thomas was instead Bartholomew. Mnats'akanian, 1986, pp. 20–21, suggests that the figure here identified as Elijah is instead an unnamed apostle who introduced Christianity to Armenia. The identification of the figure kneeling at the feet of Elijah has generally been recognized as the Widow of Sarepta; see Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 16; Davies, 1991, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Van Esbroeck, in contrast, groups the figures into pairs beginning with the first two on the left and proceeding across to the right; see Van Esbroeck, 1984, p. 173.

⁷¹ Elijah's role as the prefiguration of Christ is emphasized in the biblical account of his ascent into heaven without first undergoing death.

⁷² Luke 4:25–6, where the resurrection of the widow's son is presented as a symbol of Christ's acceptance by the Gentile Church and his refusal by the Synagogue. Elijah and Sarepta are also used metaphorically by John Catholics: 'like Elijah I fled the second Jezabel and took refuge in Sarepta of Sidon'; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 166.

⁷³ John 1:21. It may be suggested that this connection between the Gospel according to John and the figures of the main register can be used to identify the figure of the apostle in gable as John the Evangelist. The apostles Mark and Matthew are identified by inscription on the north and west façades respectively, leaving as possible candidates for the east façade the apostles Luke and John. The east façade apostle is beardless, which has led to suggestions that it is a portrait of John; Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 16; Davies, 1991, p. 89. Certainly, a representation of John best fits into the overall message of the east façade as expressed by the main figural register.

⁷⁴ Although the date of proclamation of Christianity as the state religion of Armenia has traditionally been given as 301, modern scholarship has suggested this occurred in 314; see Maksoudian, 1994, p. 24.

⁷⁵ Discussed below, p. 111 n. 85.

on a fragment of the True Cross.⁷⁶ Most importantly, according to the Armenian Church it was Bartholomew who was granted the mission to convert Armenia to Christianity.

The next pair of figures, I argue, depict the apostle Thaddeus, to the left of the central window, and to the right, James, bishop of Nisibis. Thaddeus can be termed the illuminator of the Artsruni, as he was believed to have baptized Khuran Artsruni, the first member of the Artsruni family to embrace Christianity.⁷⁷ Thomas Artsruni presents the story of Khuran's conversion in direct opposition to the Bagratuni claim, first stated by Moses Khorenats'i, that a member of *their* family was the first Armenian to undergo conversion, also at the hands of Thaddeus.⁷⁸ James, Thaddeus' counterpart on the façade, also has a connection with the Artsruni family. According to legend, James preached in Vaspurakan, and while there caused a miraculous spring to gush forth on the south shore of Lake Van. The relic of the saint's little finger was later housed in a monastery erected on the site by the Artsruni family.⁷⁹ James and Thaddeus are traditionally identified as brothers, and a further connection between the saints chosen for this façade is offered in the tradition that claims James as the father of Bartholomew.⁸⁰

The images of the holy men carved on the east façade are also grouped by geography; the terrestrial scope represented by the figures narrows as the viewer moves from the outer to the inner pairs. John and Elijah, the two forerunners of Christ who proclaimed the message of Christianity to the world at large, flank the images of Gregory the Illuminator and the apostle Bartholomew, who brought Christianity to Armenia in general, and to Vaspurakan in particular, where both have legendary associations with church-building and the deposition of relics. Gregory and Bartholomew flank the inner pair of Thaddeus and James, a pairing which focuses on Vaspurakan and on direct connections with the Artsruni family.

These saints emphasize the pious role played by the Artsruni in establishing Christianity in Armenia. They also assert the claim of the apostolic origin of the Armenian Church, a claim that was a matter of contemporary dispute with Byzantium. The main disagreement concerned who had converted Armenia. Byzantium held that Armenia's conversion had been delegated to Thaddeus, one of the 70 who had been deputized by the 12 apostles, and that therefore the Armenian Church fell under Byzantine jurisdiction.⁸¹ While the Armenian Church recognized the role of Thaddeus in its foundation, it argued that the primary agent of conversion was

⁷⁶ Thierry, 1967. The monastery, but not the relic, is noted by Thomas Artsruni; Artsruni, 1991, pp. 212–13; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 276.

⁷⁷ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 46–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 110–11.

⁷⁸ Khorenats'i, 1978, II, p. 33.

⁷⁹ Peeters, 1920, pp. 336–7, 342–73. Kaputkol, on the south shore of Lake Van, is traditionally identified as the monastery of St James; see Parsegian, 1980–90, fiche 25, no. A2318. The ruins which survive today have been identified as a structure built in the early eleventh century by the last Artsruni king; see Thierry, 1968, pp. 65–90, esp. 68–76.

⁸⁰ Chahin, 1987, p. 297.

⁸¹ The Armenians were essentially seeking *de jure* recognition of their patriarch, who had operated *de facto* as an independent entity since the mid-fifth century. For a brief review of this aspect of the Armenian–Byzantine dispute, see Der Nersessian, 1965, pp. 29ff.

4.25 Samson and the Philistine, Ezekiel, Hezekiah and Isaiah, eastern flank, north façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



Bartholomew, one of the 12 apostles.⁸² Therefore, the Armenian catholicos claimed independence from the Byzantine patriarch.

In his *History of Armenia*, John Draskhanakertsi' not only puts forward explicit claims for an autonomous Armenian Church, he also includes four legends concerning Bartholomew, all of which he sets in Vaspurakan. In contrast, contemporary Greek versions of these same legends situate them in Greater Armenia, in lands that had been incorporated into Byzantium in the fifth century.⁸³ Michael van Esbroeck has argued convincingly that Gagik Artsruni was instrumental in promoting the Armenian apostolic claim, citing as support the figures of the main figural register of east façade of the Church of the Holy Cross.⁸⁴ Certainly such a mission would add much-needed lustre to Gagik's pious reputation.

We now move from the east façade to the figural register of the north façade, which features 12 biblical figures presented alone or in narrative groups. Beginning on the far left, the first scene depicts Samson killing a Philistine; a presentation which emphasizes Samson's role as a liberator of the faithful (Figure 4.25). Next is the figure of a saint who is unidentified but for the scroll that marks him as a prophet. Then comes the prophet Ezekiel, who warned of the rule of evil princes and prophesied the captivity of Israel. He is followed by the portrait of Hezekiah, king of Judah, whose royal status is conveyed by his royal robe and turban.⁸⁵ Hezekiah is an Old Testament paradigm of pious rulership, revered for his abolition of idolatry. He is linked in biblical narrative with the prophet Isaiah, who is shown next on the façade. When Hezekiah was threatened by the Assyrian army, it was Isaiah's prayers that called down God's wrath, destroying the enemy before it attacked.⁸⁶ And when Hezekiah fell ill, it was Isaiah who prophesied his recovery.⁸⁷

Taken together, the figural sculptures of the eastern flank of the north façade illustrate the triumphs of the faithful made possible by divine assistance, emphasizing victories over non-believers. Samson and Hezekiah in particular provide forceful parallels for the reformed nature of Gagik's kingship. Samson may be a paradigm especially favoured for comparison with Gagik; Robert Thomson has noted that the rhetorical description of

⁸² The claims of the Armenian Church citing its foundation by the apostle Bartholomew are found in written accounts dating to the early fifth century, and which reflect earlier non-textual traditions; Maksoudian, 1994, p. 24. The recognition of the role of Thaddeus can be traced to eighth-century texts; Der Nersessian, 1965, 29ff.

⁸³ Van Esbroeck, 1984, pp. 168–72.

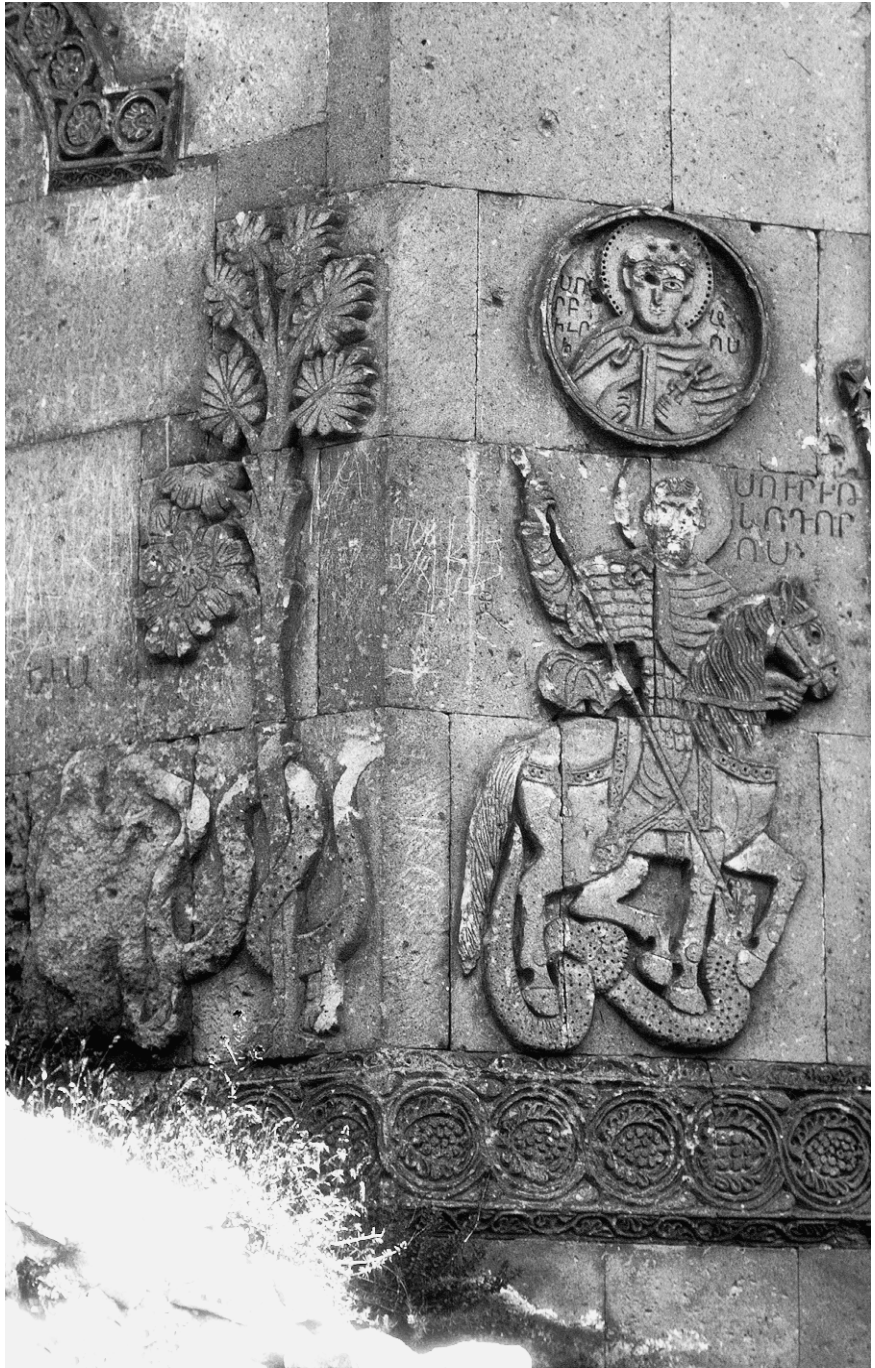
⁸⁴ *Ibid.* The portraits of unidentified bishops in the interior of the church may also have a connection with this goal; they are painted on the diagonal niches and on the piers, and are arranged in three registers to correlate with the Christological cycle. If they ever had naming inscriptions, they are now illegible; such exclusive representation of bishops is not known from any other Armenian example; the usual practice was to depict bishops as well as saints. Given the topographical focus of the figures on the east facade, it may be that these bishops were also intended to represent the pious history of Vaspurakan, dating back to the first bishop and thus establishing the claim of independence from Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁸⁵ The naming inscription which accompanies this figure is not original, but has been scratched into the stone at a later date. None the less, the figure's royal dress and turban, and Hezekiah's connection with the prophet Isaiah, suggest that this late inscription accurately reflects the original identification.

⁸⁶ Davies, 1991, pp. 91–2. The appearance of Hezekiah may reflect the need to distinguish the Armenian orthodox ruler from his Byzantine counterpart. As noted by Dagron, 2003, pp. 164–6, Hezekiah was promoted by the iconoclasts as a paradigm of pious rulership; later emperors avoided parallels with this Old Testament model.

⁸⁷ II Kings:18–20.

4.26 Eve and the Serpent; Serpent killed by St Theodore, north façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



Gagik's person in the *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, written by the anonymous continuator, has many similarities with a popular textual description of Samson.⁸⁸

The projection of the east apse features representations of the Temptation and Fall. The narrative proceeds from the right-hand side of the apse and the scene of Eve's Temptation, to the depiction of the Fall, carved to the left. This – to Western eyes – reversal of the narrative direction reflects the Syriac tradition, and is an element of Armenian art that recurs throughout the medieval period.⁸⁹ As we have seen, the scenes of the Original Sin function as part of the narrative of Adam's story, and also serve in conjunction with the interior and exterior comparisons of Adam and Gagik Artsruni.⁹⁰

Moving to the right, from the Temptation of Eve with its representation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the viewer is immediately confronted with a second serpent (Figure 4.26). This snake, however, is speared and writhing on the lance held by the equestrian saint Theodore, the subject of the first sculpture on the left-hand side of the western flank of the façade. Theodore is accompanied by his fellow military saints Sergios and George, who are also shown on horseback and in the act of vanquishing enemies (Figure 4.27). Sergios spears a lion, or perhaps a leopard, while George thrusts his lance into a bound man lying beneath his horse's feet. These three saints offer protection to the faithful, and their message of the triumph over evil that is achieved through divine aid is made explicit by the juxtapositioning of the serpent of the Temptation and the serpent that is being destroyed by St Theodore.⁹¹

While the equestrian saints convey a message symbolizing the protective benefits of faith, the biblical scenes that follow them more tangibly illustrate the promise of physical salvation that is granted to the faithful (Figure 4.28). First is the depiction of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Fiery Furnace. The three were provincial governors serving king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and were sentenced to death by fire for their refusal to worship a golden image created by the king. Their faith saved them, and after emerging unscathed, they prospered, and were even promoted by the king. The three stand together, their arms raised in prayer. All are dressed in outfits of mantles and baggy leggings that imitate those depicted on Sasanian and post-Sasanian objects.⁹²

The message of physical salvation is also conveyed by the following scene, which depicts Daniel in the lion's den. Daniel's refusal to cease his worship of

⁸⁸ Artsruni, 1985, p. 366 n. 4.

⁸⁹ See above, note 63.

⁹⁰ The regular projection of the western face of the north apse, with its gentle slope, contrasts with the irregularity of its eastern counterpart, and encourages the eye to travel to the right after viewing the scenes of Adam and Eve.

⁹¹ According to legend, at his death the Armenian martyr Sergios petitioned God to protect all who invoked his name: 'Grant to all those who believe in you and invoke my name for intercession, the remission of their sins, and save their souls and bodies from all dangers and the persecutions of the demons; grant health to the sick, victory to those who are in battle, release to those who are in captivity and prison, freedom to those who are in bondage'; *Selected Lives of the Saints* (Venice, 1874), II, 296–7 (in Armenian); translated in Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 24.

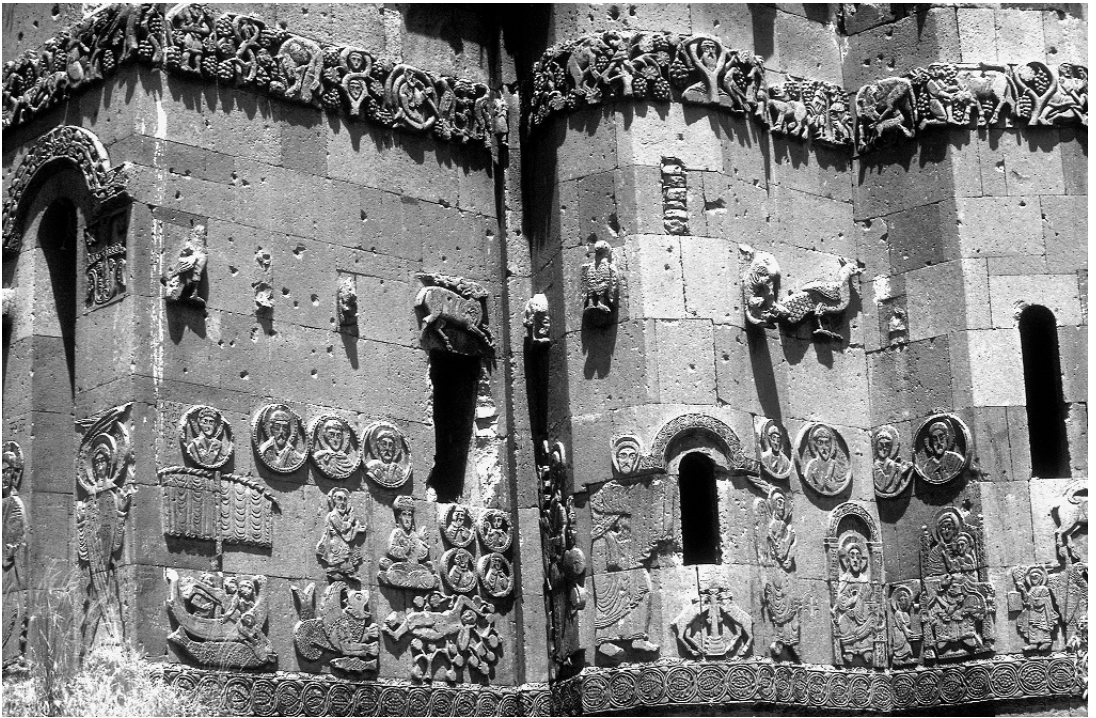
⁹² See, for example, the silver and gilt plate from Klimova, now in the Hermitage Museum, illustrated in Harper and Meyers, 1981, pl. 36.



4.27 Saints Theodore, Sergios and George, north façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



4.28 Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace, Habakkuk and Daniel in the Lion's Den, western flank, north façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



4.29 Jonah cycle, Abraham, Isaac and Moses, Angel, Christ Enthroned, Archangel Gabriel, Enthroned Virgin and Child and the Archangel Michael, western flank, south façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

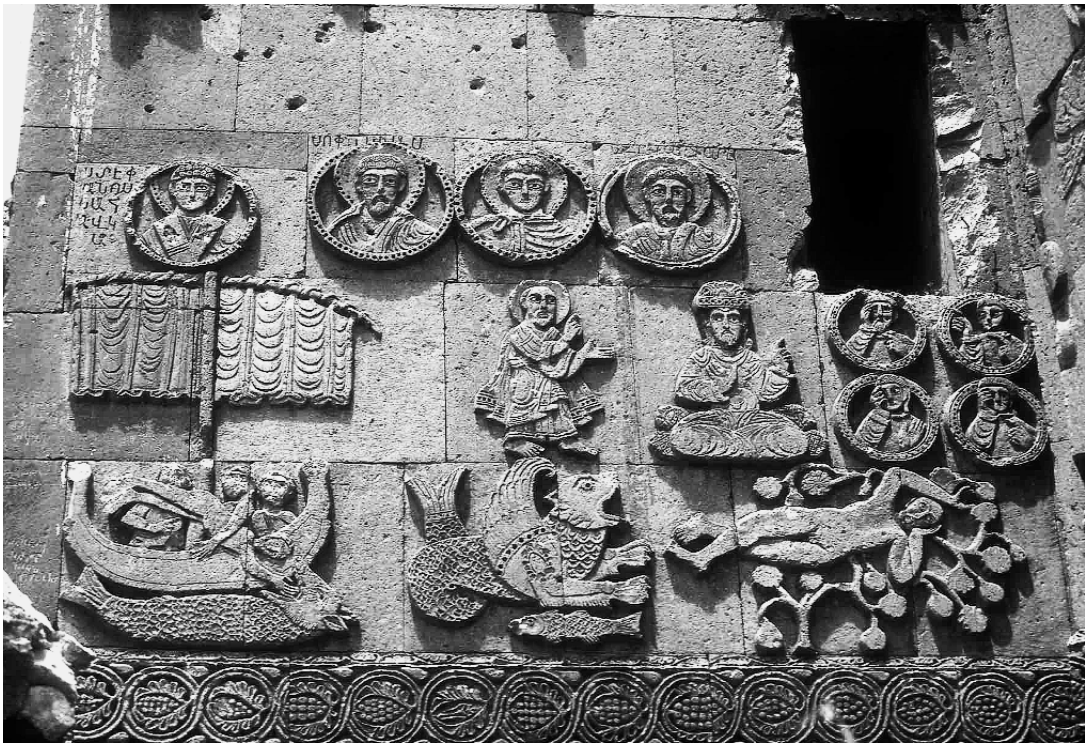
God caused Darius, the Median king of Babylon, to throw him to the lions. According to the apocryphal book of Bel and the Dragon, an angel then appeared to Habakkuk and commanded that he take Daniel his freshly prepared meal. When Habakkuk protested, he found himself picked up by the hair and unceremoniously transported to the lion's den.⁹³ The first figures in this scene carved on the Church of the Holy Cross show the angel with the prophet Habakkuk in hand, grasped firmly by the hair. Both figures are carved in half-length. Daniel, to the right of Habakkuk, is dressed in a mantle and baggy trousers, similar to those worn by the three Hebrews in the furnace. Daniel is flanked by two lions, which stand upside down with their tails drooping between their raised hind legs; both lick Daniel's feet.⁹⁴ Daniel, like the men in the furnace, emerged unscathed by virtue of his faith, and the biblical account notes that he too prospered after his ordeal.⁹⁵

The scenes on the western flank of the north façade thus illustrate the apotropaic qualities of faith, stressing the fortitude required of the faithful by God, and the benefits that will be their reward. Viewed in its entirety, the figural register of the north façade conveys Gagik's hope that his penitence

⁹³ Charles, 1913, p. 663.

⁹⁴ The submission of the fierce animals also recalls the submission to Adam of the animals in paradise.

⁹⁵ Daniel 6:7-28.

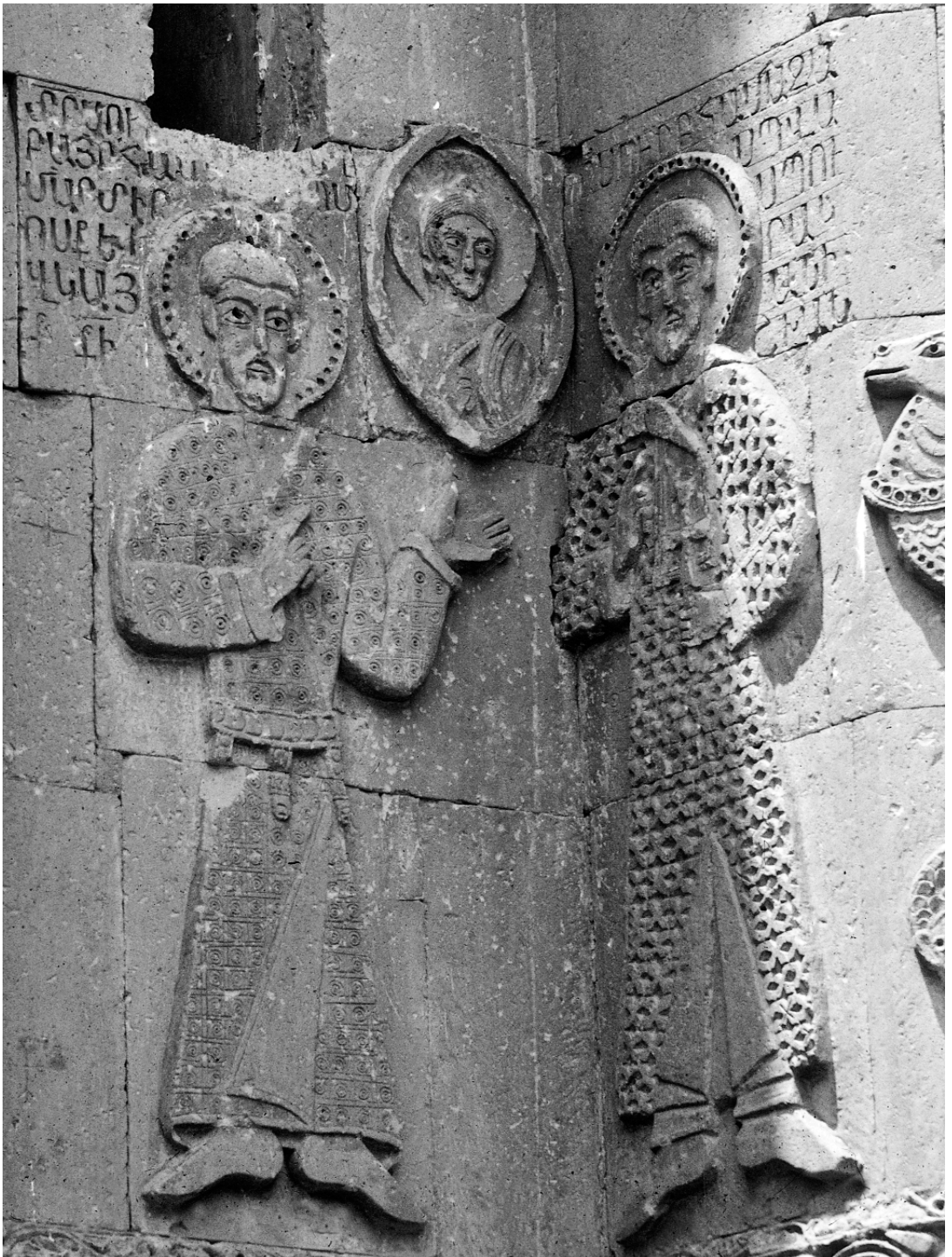


4.30 Detail, Jonah and the Whale, western flank, south façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

will allow him to reap the protective rewards granted to the faithful in the struggle against the non-believer and in the quest for personal redemption. The need for redemption is particularly emphasized by the depiction of the Original Sin.

We move next to the south façade of the church, which, as we have seen, faced the palace, contained the main entrance to the church, and was also the location of the entrance to the royal gallery (Figure 4.29). It is not surprising, then, to find that the main figural register of this façade conveys a strong royal message. For example, there is no particular reason why the representations of Christ and of the Virgin and Child should be enthroned; this is correctly seen as part of the royal nature of the façade. These royal concerns are also clearly expressed in the selection of the other figures on this façade. With the exception of Christ and the Virgin, all of the scenes of the main figural register depict a ruler or leader who successfully withstood trials imposed by God.

We begin at the far left of the façade, which is carved with scenes illustrating the story of Jonah (Figures 4.29 and 4.30). He is first shown being tossed by his shipmates into the open mouth of a whale that waits below, floating on its back. The prophet is naked, with bushy hair and a beard, and the whale has the head of a bear, the body of a fish and a finny tail. Jonah appears again to the right, resting atop a pomegranate tree following his



4.31 Saints Sahak and Hamazasp, eastern flank, south façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

expulsion from the beast, which is now depicted as a *senmurv*.⁹⁶ Jonah is still naked, but now he is also bald, reflecting a detail from an apocryphal account that attests to the depilatory properties of the whale's digestive system.⁹⁷ Jonah's story continues in the register above, where he is shown warning the king of Nineveh of the destruction of the city. The city's inhabitants, depicted in four roundels, display various gestures of dismay.

The next figural group depicts Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. The scene illustrates the moment when the ram appeared in the tree, arresting Abraham's downward plunge of the knife. Above the ram, the hand of God emerges as if from the heavens, tucked into the projection of an apse. The image of Moses is next. The Old Testament figure is shown with bare feet, carrying in his raised hands the covered tables of the Law. On the opposite side of an intervening window is carved, from left to right, an angel, the enthroned Christ, the archangel Gabriel, the enthroned Virgin and Child, and the archangel Michael.

As previously discussed, the section of the façade that follows contains the central doorway and the entrance into the royal gallery and is now obscured by a bell tower. To the immediate right of the bell tower, carved on the northeastern apse, are the images of Saints Sahak and Hamazasp (Figure 4.31). Sahak and Hamazasp were brothers and princes of the Artsrunik' family who were martyred by the Arabs in 783 for refusing to renounce their faith, and were subsequently canonized by the Armenian Church. The inscriptions that accompany the two princes are the lengthiest on the church, and stress the princes' martyrdom rather than their noble status. Their martyrdom is also emphasized by the prominent martyr's cross carried by Hamazasp, the elder brother. Their princely status is, however, not concealed, as they are clad in rich garments that reflect tenth-century fashion. Sahak, the younger prince, wears a decorated robe secured at the waist with a tabbed belt, worn over trousers. This costume is similar to that worn by Gagik's princely attendants on the east façade, and its decoration, of concentric, linked circles, replicates the decoration of Gagik's tunic in the west façade portrait. Sahak gestures with both hands to his elder brother, who is even more magnificently dressed in a caftan carved with a pattern of deeply cut interlinking x's, also worn over trousers.

The final scene on the south façade visually narrates the battle of David and Goliath (Figure 4.32). It begins with a depiction of Saul, the king of Israel, whose royal status is indicated by his turban and belted robe. Saul is offering advice to David, who moves towards the giant. Goliath is carved to the far right, near to the edge of the façade, and is, appropriately, the largest biblical figure on the Church of the Holy Cross.

⁹⁶ An interesting interpretation of one element in the narrative of Jonah at Aght'amar has been proposed by J.R. Russell, who notes that in the Armenian account of the story when Jonah is swallowed the creature is simply called a fish, but when he is thrown onto the shore the text uses the words 'dragon-fish', thus providing a simple explanation of the iconographic transformation seen on the church wall, where the fish becomes a dragon – a *senmurv*, to be precise – and a fish, which is shown swimming beneath the *senmurv*; see Russell, 1990–91, esp. pp. 142–3.

⁹⁷ The account has been linked with a version first known in the Jewish apocrypha, which states: 'the intense heat in the belly of the fish had consumed Jonah's garments and made his hair fall out'; Nordstrom, 1955–57, pp. 505–8.



Figure 4.32 Saul and David, David and Goliath, eastern flank, south façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

Jonah, the king of Nineveh, Abraham, Moses and David all serve as models of repentant and pious rulership with whom Gagik could be favourably compared. Jonah at first fled from his mission before submitting to God's will in the belly of the whale, and the king of Nineveh led his country back to righteousness by heeding the warnings of Jonah. Abraham, who was told that he would be a 'father of nations and kings', successfully underwent his test of faith.⁹⁸ Moses rescued his people from captivity and from idolatry.⁹⁹ David defended his people in battle, overcoming Goliath and becoming king. He also overcame the enmity of Saul, whose presence on the façade should be seen as a figuration of bad rulership. If, taken as a group, these figures represent the spiritual ancestry of Gagik Artsruni, his genealogical ancestry is represented by Saints Hamazasp and Sahak. Their placement directly adjacent to the entrance into the royal gallery underscores their connection with the king. The presence of these Artsrunik' saints, who sacrificed their lives in the struggle against unbelievers and who were rewarded after death, imply Gagik's willingness to make the same sacrifice.

⁹⁸ Genesis 17:6.

⁹⁹ Moses' descent bearing the tablets of the Law is compared in early Armenian literature with the evangelic activities of Mastoc's, inventor of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century; see Cowe, 1990–91, pp. 99–100.

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Royal deeds

The contemporary texts tell us much about the duties expected of Armenian royalty, including the construction of churches and monasteries and the commissioning and donation of lavish church furnishings, including illuminated manuscripts, jewelled altars and reliquaries. We also read about the secular constructions of Armenian kings, including cities and palaces. Only a few of the objects so described survive in their original state today. This chapter presents an analysis of the textual descriptions, and seeks to link their presentations of good rulership with those conveyed by royal portraits and ceremonial.

Church and monastic patronage

One way in which the elite of all medieval societies expressed their power and piety was through the establishment and embellishment of religious foundations; medieval Armenia was no exception. Contemporary histories indicate that the foundation, reconstruction and adornment of churches was a duty expected of Armenian kings, princes, catholicos and *nakharars*.¹ However, when we seek Bagratid foundations, we find little remaining architectural evidence, and written texts offer only minimal descriptions of buildings and decorative programmes which are now lost to us.

Of Ashot I we are simply told that he ‘embellished Armenian churches’.² His daughter Mariam founded two monastic churches on an island in Lake Sevan, in Siunik’. Built c. 874, one was dedicated to the Holy Apostles and one to the Mother of God; both have been rebuilt, and neither retains its original decoration.³ Mariam later built a monastic church at Shogavank’ and provided it with priests. She is also associated with the construction of a church at Vanevan, although here the primary benefactor was her brother, the future Smbat I.⁴ When he became king, Smbat built a cathedral in his royal capital of Erazgavork which was dedicated to the Holy Saviour and which featured a ‘high dome and walls of cut stone’.⁵

There is no surviving mention of any foundation, reconstruction or embellishment of churches by Ashot II; this undoubtedly reflects his long

¹ For Church and monastic patronage by bishops and catholicos in the Bagratuni period, see Thierry and Thierry, 1968, pp. 180–242; Der Nersessian, 1965, pp. 94–8. For foundations sponsored by John Catholicos, see Draskhanakertsi’, 1987, pp. 199, 222. For pre-Arab constructions by catholicos, see Der Nersessian, 1965, pp. 32–42; Maranci, 2001a, pp. 105–24, and idem, 2001b.

² Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 8.

³ Draskhanakertsi’, 1987, p. 275 n. 28; Mnats’akanian and Vahramian, 1987.

⁴ Der Nersessian, 1965, p. 81.

⁵ Draskhanakertsi’, 1987, pp. 14, 150; Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 13

struggles against the ostikan and his cousin the anti-king. Between 930 and 937 Ashot II's uncle and successor, Abas I, built a cathedral at Kars, then the Bagratid capital, in imitation of the seventh-century church of St John at Mastara. As Jean-Michel Thierry has shown, the exterior drum of the dome retains 12 sculpted figures that most likely reflect legends associated with St Gregory the Illuminator rather than the church's dedication to the Holy Apostles, which can be traced only to the nineteenth century.⁶ According to the tenth-century historian Stephen of Tarōn, the interior was ornamented 'like the heavens', but nothing remains of this decoration.⁷

As we have seen, Ashot III and his wife funded monastic churches at Sanahin and Haghbat, and embellished them with portraits of two of their sons.⁸ Smbat II began construction on a cathedral in Ani dedicated to the Mother of God. The commission was entrusted to the architect Trdat, who later went to Constantinople to restore the damage caused to Hagia Sophia by an earthquake.⁹ After Smbat II's death, construction on the cathedral continued under the patronage of Katramide, wife of Gagik I, Smbat's brother and successor.¹⁰ Gagik I also appointed Trdat to build a church at Ani dedicated to St Gregory. Architectural studies indicate that Trdat copied the plan of the seventh-century church of St Gregory at Zvart'nots', near Vagharshapat, which lay in ruins. According to Stephen of Tarōn, the church at Ani was constructed of 'great cut stones, hard and polished by hammers', and had three entrances, a central dome and windows ornamented with sculptural decoration.¹¹ This church also featured the monumental image of king Gagik I discussed above, although there is no mention of it in the surviving histories.¹²

Nakharars affiliated with the Bagratuni houses also constructed and renovated religious foundations. John Catholicos praises Grigor Supan II, the prince of Siunik' and the nephew of Smbat I: 'he surpassed his ancestors in wisdom, good fortune and erection of buildings, and devoted himself especially to the construction and renovation of the churches of Christ'.¹³ According to Stephan Orbelian, the late thirteenth-century historian and bishop of Siunik', Grigor and his wife Sophia sponsored the construction of a church in Eghegis that was decorated with paintings. In 931 Sophia built a church at Gndevank' which also featured an otherwise undescribed interior fresco programme.¹⁴ The future Bagratuni anti-king Ashot, when first

⁶ Thierry, 1978.

⁷ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 27.

⁸ For Haghbat and Sanahin see above, Chapter 3, and Kirakos of Gandjak (Gandzakets'i), 1870, p. 51.

⁹ The earthquake caused the collapse of the main west arch and a part of the dome; Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, pp. 49–50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169. For the excavation of the church and its suggested reconstruction, see Marr, 2001, pp. 107–22.

¹² Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 70.

¹³ Grigor Supan II was the nephew of Smbat I; his mother was Mariam, the king's sister; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, pp. 127, 170.

¹⁴ Der Nersessian, 1978, p. 98, citing the Armenian text of Orbelian, 1859, pp. 300, 304, 307–8. Only fragments of the tenth-century paintings at Gndevank' are now visible beneath later layers of painting. Grigor Supan's brother Sahak also constructed a church in Noratunk', near Geghark'unik' to the west of Lake Sevan; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 206.

appointed to the position of *sparapet* by Smbat, 'conceived the wonderful idea of building the beautifully ornamented church of Bagaran', then the Bagratid capital. This same Ashot later founded a church in Koghb on which 'he spent a great amount of money'.¹⁵

These passages make clear that construction and reconstruction of churches and monasteries was a deed, if not a pious duty, expected of the Bagratid nobility, both male and female. They also underscore the rhetorical similarity of the textual descriptions of these royal deeds.¹⁶ Emphasis is placed on the construction material – churches are most frequently described as being built from quarried and dressed blocks of stone rather than wood, bricks or surface material such as rocks or boulders. Bagratuni-sponsored churches are dedicated to a broad spectrum of saints, with Armenian saints predominating, but there is no indication of any one saint being singled out for particular favour. The imitation of seventh-century plans that is evident in some surviving Bagratuni churches is not mentioned in the textual descriptions. Only in the account of the foundation of Gagik I's church of St Gregory at Ani do we find a specific declaration that the plan of a Bagratuni church copies that of a preceding monument – *Zvart'nots'*, in this case. It is therefore not clear just how much symbolic meaning, if any, should be ascribed to this practice. In the case of St Gregory at Ani, there is no indication as to why *Zvart'nots'* was chosen, although its association with the Illuminator and with the conversion of Armenia makes it an obvious choice for royal patronage. We also find in these texts confirmation that Bagratuni churches were embellished with paintings, sculpture and a variety of interior decorations, but there is no information that allows the identification of any particular subject or scene.¹⁷ More pertinent to the scope of this book is the fact that no Bagratuni palatine churches survive with their decorative programmes intact, and there are no surviving descriptions of lost programmes.

When we turn to the kingdom of Vaspurakan, we find similar rhetoric employed by Thomas Artsruni and his anonymous continuators in their descriptions of pious foundations commissioned by *nakharars* affiliated with the Artsrunik' house. For example, Thomas tells us that Tadeos, a general appointed by Gagik Artsruni to oversee Van, was not only brave and valorous, but also 'magnanimous and zealous in the decoration and building of churches'.¹⁸ This descriptive generality is also present in the chapter of the *History of the House of the Artsrunik'* that details the reign of Senek'erim (1003–21), the last king of Vaspurakan. The second anonymous continuator

¹⁵ This latter construction apparently did not run smoothly, for the catholicos notes that Ashot 'tried very hard to bring it to completion with God's will'; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 155–6.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the rhetorical brevity of architectural descriptions by medieval Armenian authors, see Thomson, 1979/94, pp. 102–14, esp. 106–7.

¹⁷ The church of Saints Peter and Paul in Tat'ev, in Siunik' was built by the bishop John in the last decade of the ninth century, and embellished in 930 by his successor with paintings that still survive in fragmentary form. Orbelian's remark that the interior frescos were executed by 'Franks' has been confirmed by modern scholarship; Orbelian, 1864–66, p. 49; Thierry and Thierry, 1968; Der Nersessian 1965, pp. 93–6; Kartsonis, 1986, p. 159.

¹⁸ Artsruni, 1991, p. 281; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 344.

notes that Senek'erim built monastic churches at the summit of Mount Varag (modern Yedikilise, Turkey) and added to the monastery clustered at its base. We are also told that he filled the new church with monks and priests, but there is no information given as to the form of the churches or their decoration, if any.¹⁹ The historian is more forthcoming in his description of a church in Hadamakart built by Gagik's younger brother Gurgēn. Thomas states that Gurgēn's church featured 'two further churches to the right and left of the altar', presumably two additional chapels flanking the main altar. The stones for the church were 'hewn from a good distance' and transported to Hadamakart by 'means of carts gathered from far and near'.²⁰

Only in the accounts of one patron's royal deeds do we find an exception to this general lack of detail – the descriptions of the sacred and secular constructions associated with Gagik Artsruni. While the Church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar receives the lion's share of attention in *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, it is not the only church associated with Gagik Artsruni that is celebrated by Thomas and his anonymous continuators. The historians describe in varying detail four more churches built under Gagik's patronage. None of them survive. All were constructed between the death of Gagik's brother Ashot in 904 and his elevation to kingship in 908 – before the construction of Gagik's palatine church at Aght'amar.

Shortly after Ashot's death, Gagik rebuilt a church dedicated to the Holy Mother of God in the city of Ostan, on the southwest shore of Lake Van.²¹ Unfortunately, Thomas tells us only that Gagik supplied it with 'very valuable vessels'.²² At approximately the same time, Gagik sponsored the construction of a church dedicated to St George 'in the rocky cave of Amrakan' near the summit of Mount Van.²³ The description of the church's location raises the possibility that this church was not a built structure, but was a rock-cut church, excavated into the mountain's volcanic stone. Gagik also founded a monastery in the village of Mahrast, near Ostan, the site of a walled palace built in the seventh century by Vard the Patrician.²⁴ Gagik 'organized a settlement of monks', appointed an Abbot and set aside for the monastery 'sufficient villages for the reception of pilgrims and the care of the poor'.²⁵ Like Gurgēn's church at Hadamakart, this too featured two additional chapels flanking the main altar. According to Thomas, the church was dedicated to St Peter the Apostle, 'the invincible custodian of hell'.²⁶ This odd dedication – Peter's keys are to the gates of heaven, not hell – is explained at some length by Thomas Artsruni. Gagik had originally intended to dedicate the church to the Saving Name (P'rch'akan Anun). Thomas then goes into a rather curious digression on the acceptability of this dedication. His argument concerns the

¹⁹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 305–8; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 368–70.

²⁰ Artsruni, 1991, p. 256; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 319.

²¹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 252–3; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 315.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Artsruni, 1991, p. 255; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 318.

²⁵ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 255–6; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 318.

²⁶ Artsruni, 1991, p. 256; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 318.

Chalcedonian implications of the dedication that showed that Gagik was initially 'not rightly inclined to the faith'.²⁷

Gagik also built a second church on Mount Van. It was constructed with stone that had been quarried in Manazav (Byzantine Manzikert, modern Manazkert, Turkey), north of Lake Van, and brought to the mountain. The church was dedicated to the 'holy Sion in the holy city of Jerusalem', and featured a two-storied east end that contained five altars. The three chapels on the lower level were distributed in the usual manner, with two chapels flanking the main altar. The two chapels on the upper level were positioned directly above the lower subsidiary chapels. The chapel to the right of the main altar was dedicated to 'the crucifixion of the Lord at Golgotha'; above it was a chapel dedicated to the 'upper room of the mystical celebration of the transmission of the new covenant'. The chapel to the left of the main altar was dedicated to the 'Resurrection of Christ on the third day from the tomb, having pillaged hell'. Above it was a chapel dedicated to the Ascension, to the 'sharing of the Father's throne, and in commemoration of the Second Coming'.²⁸

While there are surviving Byzantine two-storey churches, none is known to have been dedicated to the Holy Sion or to the holy sites of Jerusalem.²⁹ There is no surviving record of any other contemporary Armenian church with such a dedication. The Church of the Holy Sion in Jerusalem commemorated the site of the Pentecost, and was, in medieval times, referred to as the 'mother of all churches'.³⁰ Gagik's church of the Holy Sion also recalled events commemorated within another prominent Christian building in Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, including Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection.³¹

Medieval architectural 'copies' of the holy sites of Jerusalem re-created the spiritual presence of the original site. While many such copies survive in western Europe, there are few known examples from the eastern Mediterranean.³² Textual evidence suggests that two early Byzantine chapels in Constantinople were built in imitation of the Anastasis Rotunda, the central church of the Holy Sepulchre complex.³³ The surviving thirteenth-century city

²⁷ Artsruni, 1985, p. 318 nn. 6, 7.

²⁸ Artsruni, 1991, p. 253; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 315.

²⁹ Two-storeyed churches are known from Byzantium; one Constantinopolitan example, the Theotokos Church of Constantine Lips (now the Fenarii Isa Camii), dates to 907 and is therefore contemporary with Gagik's constructions. The main floor of the Theotokos has two additional side chapels added to the east end, flanking the main altar. The second floor features four more chapels: two over the lower narthex, and two over the pastophoria; Macridy, 1964, pp. 251–315. Constantine Lips did have Armenian connections; he was sent on three missions to Armenia when he was *domestikos*, and his daughter married an Armenian prince. For a fuller discussion with bibliography, see Mango and Hawkins, 1964, pp. 299–315. K. Maksoudian tentatively suggests that Constantine Lips' son-in-law was Gurgēn, brother of Grigor, the prince of Mokr'; see Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 299 nn. 33–4, 1. If so, this brings us very close to Gagik Artsruni. As noted by the catholicos, Grigor and Gurgēn 'many a time met the requirements of his service to Gagik'; *ibid.*, p. 201. The late eighth-century Nea Ekklesia in Constantinople had five chapels that were dedicated to Christ, the Virgin, the archangels Michael and Gabriel, and St Nicholas. Mango, 1976, p. 111, has suggested that the same dedications may hold for the five chapels of the Church of Constantine Lips. For the problem of Byzantine two-storey churches, see G. Bals, 1936, pp. 156–67.

³⁰ For the Holy Sion and pilgrim's accounts of it, see Wilkinson, 1977, pp. 66, 171–2.

³¹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 252–3; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 320.

³² Krautheimer, 1942, pp. 1–33; Ousterhout, 1990, pp. 109–12.

³³ As pointed out by *ibid.*, p. 112, information about the Byzantine copies is limited, and neither building has been securely identified.

of Lalibela in Ethiopia, an assemblage of rock-cut churches, includes a copy of the Holy Sepulchre.³⁴ To this short list may now be added the Church of the Holy Sion on Mount Van.

Gagik's church fits into the general pattern of medieval copies. As Richard Krautheimer first noted, it is the dedication that gave these replicas their spiritual potency.³⁵ The textual emphasis given the dedication of Gagik's church of the Holy Sion reflects the relative importance of the dedication over the architectural form. While the descriptions by Thomas Artsruni give no indication that the church at Van was round, not all western copies reproduced the central plan of the Anastasis Rotunda – often, the dedication alone was sufficient to invoke the original.³⁶ Like many western copies, Gagik's church did not attempt to recreate one specific site, but rather invoked specific events in the life of Christ as well as his resurrection and promised return.³⁷ Some western copies featured imitations of venerated objects, such as the tomb of Christ, or possessed relics associated with the Passion or with Jerusalem, but again some did not.³⁸ Thomas does not describe relics associated with any of the chapels in Gagik's church; as he does mention relics housed in other sites this omission suggests that it did not house relics related to Jerusalem.³⁹ As we will see, Vaspurakan did possess at least one relic of the True Cross, but it was displayed on Mount Varag.

Many of the western copies of the Holy Sepulchre were built to commemorate a patron's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but there is no evidence that Gagik travelled further west than Samarra.⁴⁰ Some copies also served a funerary purpose, but evidence suggests that the Church of the Holy Sion was not a funerary church. The Artsrunik' family mausoleum, a monastic church also dedicated to the Holy Cross, was located in the province of Aghbag in the 'village of Awsi'. Thomas's repeated references to this church – and only this church – as the site of Artsrunik' burials suggests that none of Gagik's churches, including that on the rock of Van, served a funerary function.⁴¹ Some copies, such as those at Lalibela or Piacenza, offered the blessings of the sacred sites of Jerusalem for those unable to travel, or for times

³⁴ Della Corte, 1940, pp. 22–3, 54–63. For Lalibela compared to western copies, see Ousterhout, 1990, pp. 118–19.

³⁵ Ousterhout, 1984, p. 113.

³⁶ Paderborn, c. 1036, was octagonal, while St Michael at Fulda (820–22), the late eleventh-century Rotunda at Lanleff and the Holy Sepulchre at Cambridge (early twelfth century) are all round in plan; Ousterhout, 1990, pp. 110–15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114; Krautheimer, 1942, pp. 115–50.

³⁸ Neuvy-St-Sepulchre contained relics from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, for example, while the Baptistry of Pisa and the Holy Sepulchre in Aquileia did not possess relics. For Neuvy-St-Sepulchre, see below, note 39; for Pisa, Smith, 1978; for Aquileia, Puisi, 1977.

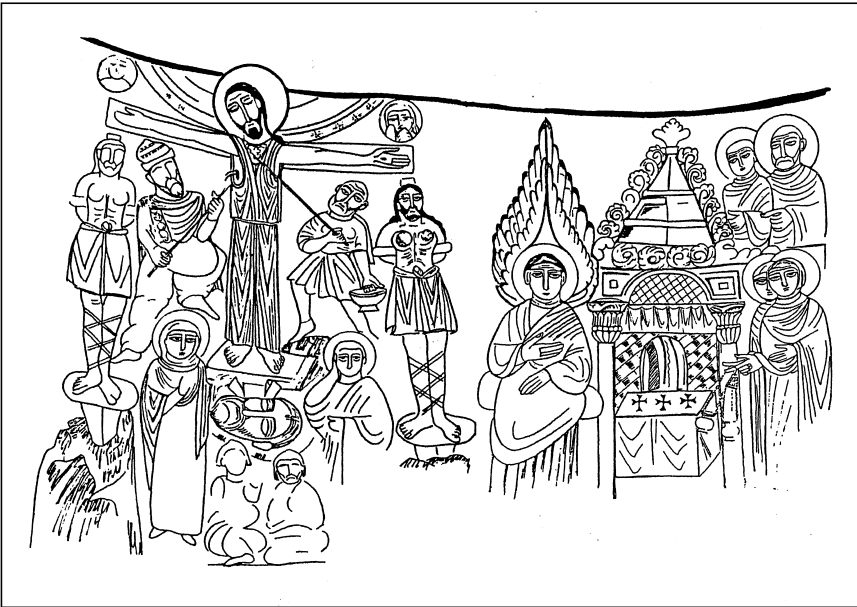
³⁹ See Ousterhout, 1984, p. 38, for a discussion of the chapel of St Michael at Fulda, Germany, which featured a central plan, a copy of the tomb of Christ, and relics from Bethlehem and Mount Sinai. Neuvy-St-Sepulchre contained a copy of the tomb, relics of the Sepulchre and the blood of Christ; *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Ousterhout, 1990, p. 118.

⁴¹ For Artsruni burials at the monastery of the Holy Cross, see Artsruni, 1991, pp. 200, 204, 219, 228, 229; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 263, 268, 281, 291, 292. Awsi, a town not otherwise known, is mentioned in *ibid.*, p. 311. For the convincing identification of the Artsruni mausoleum with the Church of the Holy Cross at Soradir, see Cuneo, 1968, 91–108; Breccia-Fratadocchi, 1971. There are no mentions of burials at the Church of the Holy Cross at Agh'tamar until the first quarter of the twelfth century; see Artsruni, 1985, p. 378 n. 6.



5.1a Crucifixion and the Skull beneath Golgotha, Women at the Empty Tomb, north wall, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar



5.1b Drawing, Crucifixion and the Women at the Empty Tomb, north wall, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar

when Palestine was inaccessible to Christian pilgrims.⁴² A similar function may be suggested for the Church of the Holy Sion. For Gagik Artsruni, the church conveyed the blessings of pilgrimage and allowed a lavish display of penitential piety without the dangerous absence that would be occasioned by an actual journey to Jerusalem.

⁴² Ousterhout, 1990, pp. 118–19; for Piacenza, see Bresc-Bautier, 1974, p. 322. A fifteenth-century text states the function of the copy of the Holy Sepulchre at Lalibela: 'Who venerates the place where your body will be buried acquires the same merit as those who venerate the place where my body was buried'; see della Corte, 1940, pp. 22–3.

According to Thomas Artsruni, the church was constructed after the death of Gagik's elder brother Ashot, but before the death of his younger brother Gurgēn. This would place it after 904 but before 915, when construction began on Aght'amar. As we have seen, it was during this period that Gagik allied himself with the ostikan Yusuf against his uncle, the Bagratuni king Smbat, an act of treachery that ultimately resulted in the king's death. Gurgēn and Gagik, appalled at the resultant death and destruction, 'were admonished as if by the fear of God, and feeling remorse in their hearts, did penance in accordance with the canons'.⁴³ It may be suggested that Gagik's Church of the Holy Sion was constructed in penance for their impious acts.

Gagik's interest in Jerusalem was not restricted to this one construction, but is also apparent in his other pious foundations. It is possible that he intended to associate the monastic church in Mahrast with Jerusalem. The original dedication of the church, the Saving Name, is associated with the Cross and with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁴⁴ References to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are also found in the decorative programme of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar. The image of the Crucifixion on the north wall features an unusually large head of Adam, prominently displayed beneath the crucified Christ (Figures 5.1a and 5.1b). This is a reference to Golgotha, or 'the place of the skull', which was believed to be the site of Adam's burial and which was included within the Holy Sepulchre complex.⁴⁵ According to the Armenian historian Sebēos, it was on this spot that Heraklios placed the True Cross after it was recovered from the Sasanian court at Ctesiphon.⁴⁶ On the same wall of Gagik's palatine church, adjacent to the Crucifixion, is the scene of the Women at the Tomb. The tomb depicted is not the rock-cut cavity described in the Gospels, but is instead the aedicule that was built over the site of Christ's burial in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This structure is frequently represented on *loca sancta*, including sixth-century ampullae.⁴⁷

Nicole Thierry has noted other Palestinian influences in Gagik's palace church. The placement of the scenes of the Ascension and Pentecost within the Christological cycle does not reflect biblical chronology. They are grouped together in the lower zone of the west exedra, next to the depiction of the Second Coming of Christ. Thierry links this seemingly odd placement to Palestinian iconographic traditions that emphasize the connection between the Ascension, the Pentecost and the Second Coming.⁴⁸ Robert Thomson sees a textual expression of this iconographic tradition in Thomas Artsruni's description of the chapel dedicated to the Ascension in Gagik's Church of the Holy Sion at Van. Thomas combines the themes of the Second Coming and the Pentecost: 'He built a church dedicated to the ascension to heaven and the

⁴³ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 173.

⁴⁴ For the use of 'Saving' in reference to the Cross and to Jerusalem, see Lampe, 1961, s.v. 'sōtērios'.

⁴⁵ For Golgotha, see Wilkinson, 1977, p. 177. The inclusion of the skull of Adam at the foot of the Crucifixion is standard in later Armenian manuscripts, but the outsized scale of the skull at Aght'amar is not equalled until the fourteenth-century Gladjor Gospels; see Mathews and Sanjian, 1991, p. 160.

⁴⁶ Sebēos, 1979, pp. 129–30; repeated in Artsruni, 1991, pp. 96–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 162–3.

⁴⁷ For example, the ampulla in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, cat. no. 48.14. For these ampullae in general, see Grabar, 1958; Weitzmann, 1974, pp. 33–55; Vikan, 1982, pp. 19ff.

⁴⁸ Thierry, 1978, pp. 709–22.

sharing of the Father's throne, and in commemoration of the second coming, when he will come in the Father's glory with the angels to the Apostles, bringing them the consoling and encouraging gospel.⁴⁹

The textual descriptions of Gagik's church and monastic patronage, including his suggested devotion to the sacred sites of Jerusalem, demonstrate his participation in expressions of piety common throughout medieval Christendom. A passage in *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'* that describes the planning and construction of Gagik's palace church presents an expression of royal piety that may be traced to a very different source. The anonymous continuator describes in great detail Gagik's seizure of stones from a Zurarid fortress and their reuse in the palace church at Aght'amar: 'He totally destroyed that tribe and the buildings of the castle, demolishing [it] to its foundation, and removing its stones he carried them upon the waves of the lake, using them as material for the construction of his church, raising in place of the impure houses of idolatry the temple of glory.'⁵⁰ Several other passages in *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'* make it clear that suitable building materials were scarce in the southern regions of Lake Van; these stress the difficulties of acquisition and transport. As we have seen, Thomas states that Gagik cut stones in the city of Manazav and brought them to the rock of Van for use in the construction of the Church of the Holy Sion. In relating this feat, Thomas praises the organizational skills of prince Gagik and the efficiency with which the stones were brought across the lake. He describes the orderly procession of the wooden ships as they moved up and down over the waves with their cargo, travelling as if they were on a road, traversing liquid hills and valleys.⁵¹ Gagik's brother Gurgēn also transported stones for use in his pious constructions. When Gurgēn built a church in Hadamakert, Thomas tells us that the stones were 'hewn at a good distance – about three *stadia* away' and brought to Hadamakert by carts 'gathered from far and near'.⁵²

The passage describing the transfer of stones to the Church of the Holy Cross has a different emphasis: it is not the challenge of finding suitable stone and transporting it to its island destination that the historian praises. He instead emphasizes the pious use to which Gagik puts the stones – the cleansing of their impure associations by their reuse. I know of no other Armenian examples in which the taking of stones from a secular building and their reuse in a religious foundation is imbued with symbolism. Gagik's reuse of these materials as presented in the contemporary history may reflect the documented Abbasid practice of incorporating symbols of a defeated people into their royal constructions. One well-known example occurred during the construction of Baghdad, when the caliph ordered the demolition of the Sasanian royal city of Ctesiphon. The stones, he decreed, would be reused in the building of his new city as a testament to the power of the new dynasty.⁵³

⁴⁹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 253; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 315–16; Thomson, 1986/94, p. 85.

⁵⁰ Artsruni, 1991, p. 297; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 359.

⁵¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 257; translated Artsruni, 1985, p. 320.

⁵² Artsruni, 1991, p. 256; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 319.

⁵³ For the construction of Baghdad, see Lassner, 1970, p. 128.

The Abbasid caliph al-Mansur brought iron gates from the palace of Wasit, the Umayyad capital of Iraq, and installed them at Baghdad.⁵⁴ These gates were believed to have been made by Solomon, and had been installed during construction of Wasit by the Umayyad caliph al-Hajjaj.⁵⁵ A second set of gates brought from Syria was believed to have been made for the Egyptian Pharaohs.⁵⁶ The Zurarids from whom Gagik seized the fortress were no doubt aware that the stones were taken for use in the construction of Gagik's royal city, and would recognize the symbolism conveyed by this reuse.⁵⁷

The *textual* presentation of this act was concerned with a different audience, and was fashioned to convey a very different meaning. It may be suggested that an Armenian audience would see parallels between Gagik's reuse of the stones, as relayed by the anonymous continuator, and a legend repeated by both Thomas Artsruni and John Catholicos. Following the eradication of the Arsacid Armenian kings, the city of Duin was the residence of the Persian governors. A fire temple in the city was destroyed by the prince Vardan Mamikonian. Vardan then 'built with the same stones' the church of St Gregory on the site of the destroyed temple.⁵⁸ Gagik's reuse was of course different, as it involved materials taken from a secular building and reused in a religious construction that was built across the lake rather than on the same site. The anonymous continuator seems aware of these differences, as he takes liberties with the truth in order to align the details of the story more closely with those of the legend. We are first told that the stones came from the Zurarid 'castle'; later in the same sentence, they are characterized as being from 'impure houses of idolatry'. Gagik is also said to have built his 'temple of glory' 'in place of' the razed Arab buildings.⁵⁹ The phrase 'in place of', when considered in the context of the legend of Vardan Mamikonian and the church of St Gregory, seems designed to further the appearance of similarity between the deeds of Gagik and those of Vardan in the eyes of the Armenian audience.

PIOUS GIFTS: CHURCH FURNISHINGS

The donation of lavish church furnishings, including illuminated manuscripts, was a duty expected of medieval princes and kings. Churches resplendent with silver and gold gave visual expression to the power and piety of their patrons. There is limited information on such embellishments in the contemporary Armenian histories.

According to the catholicos, Smbat I decorated the church in Erazgawork' with 'rare and beautiful ornaments, gold-broidered vestments, and flaxen curtains. He also installed on the altar of Christ an arch made out of pure gold

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 136.

⁵⁵ Grabar, 1955, p. 317.

⁵⁶ O. Grabar, 1973, p. 71. There is also evidence that the green dome that topped the caliph's reception hall in Baghdad imitates that found at the Umayyad palace at Wasit; *ibid.*

⁵⁷ See above, Chapter 1, for intermarriage between the Artsrunik' and Zurarid.

⁵⁸ This occurred in the second half of the fifth century; see Artsruni, 1991, pp. 78–9; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 145; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, p. 90.

⁵⁹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 297; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 359.

which was studded with gems'.⁶⁰ Katramide, the wife of Gagik I, furnished the cathedral at Ani with tapestries embroidered with purple flowers, 'cloths of gold and diverse colours' and gold and silver vessels.⁶¹ A bronze chandelier discovered during the excavation of Gagik I's church of St Gregory at Ani is carved with the figures of eagles and fabulous creatures. It originally also featured eight metal doves from which were suspended chains holding 32 glass lamps, attesting to the original splendour of the interior furnishings.⁶²

According to Thomas Artsruni, at some time before 904 a thief took a wooden cross from an unnamed church in Ostan.⁶³ As he peeled off the silver covering, he was seized by demons and thrown from his mountain perch. Villagers gathered the scattered fragments and took them to Gagik Artsruni, who ordered it repaired 'with pure silver more splendidly than before'.⁶⁴ Gagik also furnished the newly constructed church of St George with a censer 'worked in choice silver and emblazoned with the sign of Christ's cross'.⁶⁵ According to the anonymous continuator, Gagik filled the Church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar with 'gilt ornaments and with images encased in gold and precious stones and pearl ornaments'.⁶⁶ Gurgēn Artsruni donated 'vessels worked in gold, signed with the cross and set with pearls and precious stones' to a church in the former Artsruni capital of Hadamakart.⁶⁷

Wealthy patrons throughout the medieval world donated illuminated manuscripts to pious foundations. While only a handful of manuscripts have survived from the Bagratuni period, two are linked to royal donors.⁶⁸ The so-called Gospel of Queen Mlk'e (San Lazzaro 1144) was commissioned by Gagik for the Church of the Holy Cross at Varag. Although Gagik's colophon was scraped off to make room for that of a seventeenth-century owner, the original inscription commemorating his gift is still faintly visible:

Of gold ... and decorated ... and of pearl ... of vines ... and I Gagik ... in Varag Holy Cross with its water ... the fields ... in memory ... in it ... treasure st n ... if anyone v ... Who constructed it for the health of Gagik and for the well-being of his soul and expiation of sins and mistakes ... and whoever thwarts and takes away the holy book from Varag shall be discarded by God and the Holy Cross, and whoever preserves it in the church ... he shall be blessed by God.⁶⁹

The familiar name of the manuscript is derived from a colophon on fol. 147. In it, a Queen Mlk'e claims to have 'given the Gospels to the Church of the Holy Cross of Varag which I caused to be built by my hand and my expense and my help, and that of my king Gagik and his sons'.⁷⁰ It should be noted that she

⁶⁰ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 150.

⁶¹ Stephen of Tarōn, 1883–1917, p. 139.

⁶² Marr, 2001, pp. 121–2.

⁶³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 244–45; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 307.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 252; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 315.

⁶⁶ Artsruni, 1991, p. 299; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 361.

⁶⁷ Artsruni, 1991, p. 257; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 320.

⁶⁸ Mathews and Wieck, 1994, pp. 55–65, provides an overview of Armenian manuscript painting of this period.

⁶⁹ Janashian, 1966, p. 16.

⁷⁰ Mathews and Wieck, 1994, p. 57.



5.2 Ascension, Gospel of Queen Mlk'e, San Lazzaro 1144, fol. 8

does not claim to have commissioned the work, as Gagik does in his colophon. This may indicate that the work was commissioned late in Gagik's life and not completed until after his death, at which time it was donated by Mlk'e. Although the anonymous continuator states that Gagik was married, his wife is not named.⁷¹ The precise date of the commission is not known, but as Gagik is called 'king' in the colophon, it can be loosely dated to the years of his reign, 915–43.⁷²

The manuscript retains six of the original ten canon tables, portraits of the four Evangelists, and a full-page painting of the Ascension, the latter the only miniature to survive from the prefatory cycle (Figure 5.2).⁷³ The book is large, with pages measuring 33.5 × 28 cm.⁷⁴ The artist employed a wide variety of styles that encompass virtually the entire Mediterranean world, reflecting Classical, Byzantine and Syrian traditions. The Canon Tables are decorated with nilotic scenes reminiscent of Pompeiian murals, the Ascension owes its frontality and static arrangement of figures to Byzantine manuscripts, and while two of the Evangelists are shown seated in the classical manner, the other two are standing in the Syrian style.⁷⁵ Thomas Mathews has called attention to the similarity between this archaizing style and that of manuscripts produced at the same time in Constantinople, during the so-called Macedonian Renaissance.⁷⁶ The palette, however, remains undeniably Armenian – bold and vibrant, with orange, purple and scarlet predominating.⁷⁷ Because it is the single remaining royal Artsrunik' manuscript, it is not clear whether the diverse range of styles reflects the influence of Byzantine manuscripts or is the result of artists which Gagik 'gathered from all nations of the earth' to aid him in his royal constructions.⁷⁸

The colophon clearly indicates the reason for the gift: the 'expiation of sins and mistakes'. To my knowledge, this clause is unique; it is not found in any other surviving medieval Armenian colophons. The message of repentance that it conveys is, as we have seen, an underlying theme of Gagik Artsruni's pious deeds as prince and king.

The Gospel of Gagik-Abas of Kars (Jerusalem, St James 2556), was discussed above in the discussion of Bagratuni royal portraits. It has been demonstrated that the portrait of the royal family that is now bound into this Gospel was originally part of another manuscript. We now turn our attention to the Gospel, which is the only remaining illuminated manuscript that can be securely attributed to royal Bagratuni patronage. It has been sadly diminished

⁷¹ Gagik 'took the daughter of Apuhamza to wife'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 279; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 341.

⁷² Mathews and Orna, 1992, p. 528, inaccurately date Gagik's rule to 908–21. A date 'in the 920s' is given without explanation in Mathews and Wieck, 1994, pp. 57ff.. Janashian, 1966, pp. 16–21, dates the manuscript to c. 865, based on style and on the misreading of the letter 'a' on fol. 222v as a calendar number. This date is followed in Mathews and Sanjian, 1991, p. 52.

⁷³ The book was cut down and rebound some time after 1515, but the text of the Gospels as it survives today is complete; Janashian, 1966, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Mathews and Orna, 1992, p. 528.

⁷⁵ Mathews and Wieck, 1994, p. 57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the specifically Armenian nature of the manuscript, see Janashian, 1966, p. 22; Mathews and Wieck, 1994, p. 58.

⁷⁸ Artsruni, 1991, p. 295; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 356–7.

by the removal of all but 15 of the over two hundred narrative miniatures originally interspersed throughout the text. The original number of illustrations is remarkable, as is the manuscript's size.⁷⁹ It currently measures approximately 46 × 35 cm, suggesting that originally it was approximately 52 × 40 cm – significantly larger than contemporary Byzantine Gospels.⁸⁰ The size of the book, abundance of illustrations and high quality of the miniatures and script suggests that it did not function as a private devotional book, but was donated to a church. The most likely recipient would be the cathedral of Kars, in the capital of Gagik-Abas' kingdom.

Thomas Mathews has noted that 'themes of rank and authority' are dominant in the surviving miniatures.⁸¹ The book undoubtedly reflected the piety and wealth of Gagik-Abas; the style of the paintings and the sophistication of its design and execution also reflected the king's links with the greater world of Christian rulers – and of Christian manuscript production. Der Nersessian dates the work to 1045–54, connecting the style with that of an artist responsible for a Byzantine lectionary of 1059. That manuscript is now in Mount Athos (Dionysios 587), but is believed to have been produced in Constantinople.⁸² Gagik-Abas had ties with the Byzantine court; according to Matthew of Edessa, he visited Constantinople. He also corresponded with Grigor Pahlawuni, the Armenian scholar known in Byzantium as Gregory Magistros.⁸³ However, the interpretation of specific scenes in Gagik-Abas' Gospel remains resolutely Armenian. As Der Nersessian has shown, none of the scenes replicate their Byzantine counterparts, and there are scenes that are not found in Byzantine Gospels, such as that depicting the meeting of Christ and the rich young man.⁸⁴

It has been suggested above that Goranduxt, the wife of Gagik-Abas, commissioned the royal portrait that is currently bound into his Gospels. The secular nature of this portrait is clear, as is its debt to Islamic iconography. When we consider this portrait together with the Gospels, we find that the works commissioned by Gagik-Abas and Goranduxt employ different means of expressing royal power and piety. Piety, as expressed in the Gospels of Gagik-Abas, is given a gloss of Byzantine influence – but the Byzantine style is at the service of a specifically Armenian Orthodox tradition of iconography. We have seen this dichotomy before, in the double investiture accorded to the first three Bagratid kings of Armenia and in the portraits of Gagik Artsruni on the exterior of his palace church. In all of these, the visual expression of temporal power utilizes Islamic iconography and ideology, while royal piety and divine approval of royal rule is expressed by an emphasis of the specifically Armenian nature of the rulers' faith. What is new in the Gospels of

⁷⁹ Mathews and Wieck, 1994, p. 60, suggest that originally there were over 227 miniatures, and characterize the manuscript as 'the most ambitious program of Gospel illumination ever undertaken in medieval art'.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸² Der Nersessian, 1984, p. 94; idem, 1978, p. 110.

⁸³ The letters document the king's desire to establish an academy in Kars that would offer the study of Greek literature; Matthew of Edessa, 1993, p. 154; Langlois, 1869, p. 45 no. 37.

⁸⁴ Der Nersessian, 1978, pp. 110–14.

the last Bagratid ruler of Kars is the appropriation of Byzantine style to express Gagik-Abas' orthodoxy.

Pious gifts: Relics

Illuminated manuscripts, sumptuous hangings and gilded vessels were not the only objects of royal patronage. Relics served as visible testimony of the rulers' piety, and the possession of such objects also reflected divine approval of the ruler. Most of the relics mentioned in the medieval Armenian histories entered Armenia before the Arab conquest.⁸⁵ Occasionally, a historian's embellishment of an earlier account suggests personal familiarity with relics and may confirm their later survival.⁸⁶ There is, however, scant evidence of new relics being acquired by Bagratuni or Artsrunik' rulers; most of the surviving texts describe the refurbishment of existing relics and reliquaries. Particular emphasis is given to relics of the True Cross.

According to a legend formulated in the late fourth century, the True Cross was discovered in Jerusalem, then part of the Eastern Roman Empire, by Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine I.⁸⁷ The agent, site and circumstance of this discovery established Byzantine control of the Cross. The Cross, regarded as the visible symbol of Christ's victory over death, became a symbol of the emperor's triumph over enemies, and relics of the Cross were prominently featured in imperial processions and coronations.⁸⁸ The Cross was also revered for its apotropaic and protective functions. Byzantine emperors carried fragments of the Cross into battle to ensure victory, and hymns sung before military engagements invoked the Cross as a weapon and

⁸⁵ For the relics of Makhozh, a Magian who converted to Christianity and was martyred in Duin, see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 93. For the relics of the catholicos and saint, Sahak I, in the martyrdom of John the Baptist and Athenogines in Ashtishat in Tarōn (north of Muş, west of Lake Van), see Artsruni, 1985, p. 140. J.-M. Thierry, 1983, cols 380–406, notes that there were at least seven churches in Tarōn dedicated to the Precursor. As noted above, the little finger of St James of Nisibis was housed in the monastery built on the south shore of Lake Van by the Artsruni family; Peeters, 1920, pp. 336–7, 342–73. Relics associated with St Gregory the Illuminator were kept in the monastery at the base of Mount Varag, including an altar, pastoral staff, engraved ring and 'the girdle of his diligent waist'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 64; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 128. They were taken to Agh'tamar for safe keeping in the late eleventh century, joined by St Hripsimē's slippers, scarf and arm, in addition to others; see Artsruni, 1991, p. 310; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 373. Documented relocation of relics include those of St Hripsimē. Initially housed in the cathedral in Vagharshapat – see Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 97 – according to Thomas Artsruni, they were later transferred to Dzoroy Vank', a martyrdom in Vaspurakan attributed in legend to Gregory the Illuminator; Artsruni, 1991, p. 63; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 128. A miraculous image of the Virgin housed in the monastery of Hogeats Vank' was believed to have been painted by the apostle John on a fragment of the True Cross and brought to Vaspurakan by St Bartholomew; see Frolow, 1961, p. 212. By the reign of Senek'erim, the last king of Vaspurakan, it was moved to the monastery of the Holy Cross at Mount Varag; Matthew of Edessa, 1993, pp. 22–3.

⁸⁶ As in John Catholicos's description of the foundation of Zvart'nots' and the translation of the relics of Gregory the Illuminator. He first repeats Sebēos: Nerses divided the saint's relics and placed them beneath the four pillars of the church. He then adds that the saint's skull was kept 'out in the open in a cabinet in the divine treasury', where it was available for those seeking solace and miraculous cures. Zvart'nots' was still standing in the tenth century; Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 102; Thomson, 1989, p. 177.

⁸⁷ The most complete study, with bibliography, of the legends surrounding Helena and the discovery of the Cross is Drijvers, 1992. See too idem, 1999; Walker, 1990, esp. pp. 126–30.

⁸⁸ For the evolution of the symbolism and veneration of the relic of the True Cross during the fourth to sixth centuries, see Frolow, 1958, pp. 13–30; S. Der Nersessian, 1950, pp. 193–98; Holum, 1977, pp. 153–72; R.H. Storch, 1970, pp. 105–17; Drijvers, 1992; Drijvers and Drijvers, 1992.

source of protection.⁸⁹ During periods of siege, a fragment of the Cross was paraded along the walls of Constantinople.⁹⁰

It was also a Byzantine practice to distribute fragments of the Cross, often enclosed in Byzantine-produced reliquaries, to foreign rulers, dignitaries and religious officials, to reward orthodoxy, confirm the political legitimacy of the recipient, or promote one individual or dynasty over another.⁹¹ The imperial court controlled distribution of these relics; for much of the medieval period, other Christian cultures could obtain fragments of the Cross only from Byzantium. The receipt of such a gift increased the legitimacy of a ruler, reflecting the acknowledgment by the imperial court of his pious status and his temporal power.

Fragments of the True Cross were among the gifts presented by Byzantium to Armenian rulers. None of these relics and their reliquaries survive; they are known to us only from textual descriptions. At first glance, these texts suggest that Armenian veneration of the Cross, specifically the patronage devoted to relics of the True Cross by the elite and the emphasis given these acts of patronage in contemporary histories, consciously emulated a Byzantine expression of pious rulership. This interpretation frequently adds to the perception of a more advanced culture disseminating precious objects, enclosed in artistically superior reliquaries, to lesser vassal nations. In this view, the relics received by grateful non-Byzantine recipients were venerated not only for their intrinsic value, but also for the high quality of their execution. Implicit here is the idea that the recipient cultures, while able to recognize and appreciate superior artistic quality, were unable to produce equivalent objects.

I seek to correct this view through an examination of how the Byzantine provenance of these Cross relics is emphasized or denied in the written texts. In some cases, the link with Byzantium was emphasized – these relics' secular associations with Byzantium were given primacy over their pious associations and their links with Eastern Orthodoxy. In other cases the relics' Byzantine provenance was obscured or eliminated through the creation of new reliquaries or of new textual accounts detailing their acquisition. I suggest that these new texts and reliquaries served to assign to the relics a new, Armenian identity.

Such a gift was not necessarily expressive of the perceived piety of the recipient, but could be awarded to promote pro-Byzantine rulers and to counter opposing influences. Such was undoubtedly the case when the Byzantine Patriarch Photios sent Ashot I a letter accompanied by a fragment of the True Cross immediately following Ashot's recognition as king of Armenia by the caliphal court. The relic, which does not survive, was later

⁸⁹ For the Cross taken into battle by Maurice, see Theophylact Simocattes, 1972, V.16 p. 220; for Heraklios, see Georges Pisides, 1953, p. 92; Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus also mentions the practice in *idem*, 1829/30, *append. Ad lib. I*, p. 485. McCormick, 1986, pp. 241–52, 309–10, discusses the adoption of this practice by non-Byzantine rulers. It was Crusader practice for the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, or occasionally the prior of the Holy Sepulchre, to carry the Cross into battle; see Frolow, 1961, pp. 287–90; William, Archbishop of Tyre, 1943, vol. II, p. 388; Riley-Smith, 1988, pp. 54ff.; Folda, 1995, pp. 34–5, 49.

⁹⁰ Walter, 1997, pp. 193–220; Frolow, 1961, pp. 192–3.

housed in a monastery founded by Mariam, Ashot I's daughter, on an island in Lake Sewan.⁹² This gift to the first Bagratuni king of Armenia was echoed in the reign of Gagik II of Ani, the last Bagratuni ruler. According to Matthew of Edessa, Constantine IX Monomachos sent a letter to Gagik accompanied by 'a Gospel and a relic of the True Cross', to ensure his visit to Constantinople.⁹³

Relics of the True Cross are also emphasized in the written histories of Tarōn, Siunik' and Vaspurakan. *The History of Tarōn*, written between 966 and 988 by an anonymous author known as Pseudo-Yovhannes Mamikonean, relates the provenance of the Cross of Tsitsarn. According to this text, after the Byzantine emperor Heraklios retrieved the True Cross from the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon, he granted a fragment of the relic to John, the Patriarch of Caesarea. An Armenian nobleman, Vahan Kamsakaran, then purchased it from John and installed it in the altar of a church dedicated to John the Baptist (*Karapet*, or Precursor) in the Monastery of Glak in Tarōn. The prince of Arjk' engineered the theft of the relic and its relocation to Tsitsarn in Tarōn, where he constructed a church to house it. The loss of the Cross relic was revealed to Vahan in a vision. He was instructed to leave the relic in its new home, as there it would be safe from further theft.⁹⁴

Heraklios' recovery of the True Cross is also a key element in a legend related by the late twelfth-century anonymous author known as Pseudo-Shapuh. One section of this text, subtitled 'History of Heraklios, emperor of the Greeks', sets forth the provenance of a relic of the True Cross in the monastery of Hats'iun in Siunik'.⁹⁵ According to this account, the Byzantine recapture of the Cross was facilitated by an Armenian nobleman who disguised himself as a merchant, penetrated the Sasanian court, discovered the whereabouts of the relic and sent word to Heraklios.⁹⁶ The emperor retrieved the Cross, and travelled through Armenia on his return to Constantinople. He stopped to thank Beryl (*Biwregh*), the Armenian princess of Siunik', for her earlier contribution of troops and arms in the fight against the Sasanians, and asked what she would like in return. Although Beryl first demurred, when pressed, she requested a fragment of the Cross. Heraklios refused, but after Beryl's departure he reconsidered his actions and grew remorseful: 'I have acted badly.'⁹⁷

A member of the imperial entourage, the Armenian philosopher John (Yovhannēs) Mayragomets'i, challenged this lack of imperial generosity.⁹⁸ When Heraklios explained that he did not want to cut the relic with an iron

⁹² There is no indication as to whether this relic came equipped with a Byzantine reliquary; Frolow, 1961, p. 223; Vogt, 1908, p. 316; Akinian and Tēr Pōlosean, 1968, pp. 445–6.

⁹³ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, p. 71. This relic and any reliquary no longer survive.

⁹⁴ Pseudo-Yovhannes Mamikonian, 1993, pp. 156–9, 246–7. For the monastery at Glak', see *ibid.*, pp. 32–3.

⁹⁵ The earliest manuscript relating the tale of Heraklios and the Cross of Hats'iun is preserved as *Matenadaran 3777* and dates to 1185–88. For this and other versions of the tale, see Thomson, 1988/89, pp. 171–81; Frolow, 1961, pp. 191–2.

⁹⁶ The tale of 'Constantine' the Armenian spy is unique to the anonymous writer known as 'Pseudo-Shapuh'.

⁹⁷ Thomson, 1988/89, p. 189.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175, notes of Mayragomets'i, a notoriously outspoken opponent of the Byzantine church: 'a less likely friend of Heraklios would be hard to imagine'. For Mayragomets'i, see Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 98–100.

sword, the only available tool, John suggested that resolution of the matter should be left to God. Following his instructions, the sword was placed within the reliquary, which Heraklios then sealed shut. The princess was recalled to the imperial camp, and John instructed her to pray: 'if it seems pleasing to the Lord your God, he will give you in accordance with your faith a piece of his wooden Cross'.⁹⁹ A contingent of Armenian bishops and priests kept a prayerful watch over the reliquary throughout the night. When the emperor opened the reliquary the next morning, he discovered that two fragments had miraculously separated from the main relic. Beryl took them and began her journey home. Near the fortress of Hats'iun, the mule drawing her carriage stopped and refused to advance further; when the princess attempted to carry the fragments of the Cross, she too became miraculously immobile.¹⁰⁰ After seeking advice from a local hermit, she established a monastery on the site and deposited the relics there.

Vaspurakan also possessed a celebrated relic of the True Cross. According to a tradition related by both Thomas Artsruni and Pseudo-Shapuh, the Cross of Varag was first revealed in the seventh century to Vard Rshtunik', who held the Byzantine rank of patrician and is therefore known as Vard the Patrician.¹⁰¹ The monastery at the foot of Mount Varag is connected in legend with Gregory the Illuminator, who was said to have built a church there in honour of the martyr saint Hripsimē after the conversion of Armenia.¹⁰² The Cross relic, which no longer exists, was not housed in the main monastic complex, but was kept at the summit of the mountain, perhaps in a shrine or chapel. Gagik Artsruni supplied the relic with a new reliquary.¹⁰³

Taken together, the legends of the Crosses of Tarōn, Siunik' and Vaspurakan indicate the importance of these relics as indicators of the piety of Armenian rulers. At first glance, they also suggest that Armenian veneration of the Cross, specifically the patronage devoted to relics of the True Cross by the Armenian elite and the emphasis given these acts of patronage in the contemporary histories, consciously emulated a Byzantine expression of pious rulership. It is therefore instructive to see how the Byzantine provenance of these Cross relics is emphasized or denied in the written texts. The accounts of the two relics of the Cross presented to Ashot I and Gagik II by Photios and Constantine IX, respectively, stress the Byzantine origin of the fragments. While relics provided tangible evidence of the possessor's piety, it can be argued that like Byzantine titles bestowed on non-Byzantine rulers, relics presented by the Byzantine court also conveyed status and confirmed the political legitimacy of the recipient. In the case of the Cross relics presented to the first and last Bagratid kings of Armenia, the relics' secular associations with Byzantium were given primacy over their pious associations and their links with Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁹⁹ Thomson, 1988/89, p. 189.

¹⁰⁰ For the *topos* of the 'miraculous immobility of relics', see *ibid.*, p. 189 n. 40.

¹⁰¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 254; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 317; Thomson, 1988/89, p. 262.

¹⁰² Artsruni, 1991, p. 214; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 278; Frolov, 1961, p. 213.

¹⁰³ The construction of a monastic complex at the summit is attributed to Senek'erim, the last king of Vaspurakan; see above and note 85. For the chronological problems inherent in the text, see Artsruni, 1985, p. 317 n. 1

In contrast, the tales relating the history of the Cross relics of Tsitsarn and Hats'iun take pains to distance the relics from their Byzantine provenance. Both begin by connecting the fragments of the True Cross with Heraklios, suggesting that an imperial association (preferably a distant one) was useful in establishing the venerable age and authenticity of the relics. However, in both legends God's will is revealed to Armenians, or is revealed through the participation of Armenians. The anonymous author of the legend of the Cross of Hats'iun is most insistent in this matter. It is only with the assistance of an Armenian nobleman that Heraklios is able to locate the Cross in the royal palace of Ctesiphon, and thus recapture it. Heraklios is also ignorant of God's wish to grant Beryl a fragment of the relic until it is pointed out to him by John Mayrogometsi. Finally, the anonymous author is careful to differentiate Heraklios' role from that assigned to divine agency. It is not Heraklios but God who grants the relic to Armenia – and who therefore can be identified as the true donor. This textual reassignment of patronage effectively annulled the relic's Byzantine provenance and gave it an Armenian identity.

A similar transferral of patronage may be suggested for the Cross of Tsitsarn. In the text, prince Vahan receives a divine vision in which an unnamed 'luminous man', presumably Christ, tells him that although 'those maniacs' have stolen 'my cross', Vahan should leave it in its new home, as it will be safe there.¹⁰⁴ While a series of miracles revealed God's wish that the Cross of Hats'iun should be in Armenia, Christ himself approved the housing of a fragment of the True Cross at Tsitsarn.

When we turn to the True Cross at Varag, we find that Thomas Artsruni gives only a brief account of its provenance: 'This is the cross which we mentioned above when we described its appearance 259 years previously in the time of Nerses II Catholicos of Armenia, and Vard the Patrician of Rshtuni, in the year when the Muslims occupied Armenia.'¹⁰⁵ In his discussion of the provenance of the same Cross, the second anonymous continuator, writing in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, omits any reference to the catholicos or Vard the Patrician, and instead relates its earlier history. The Cross, he informs us, was brought to Varag by St Hripsimē, a nun who fled Diocletian's persecutions.¹⁰⁶ The link with Hripsimē is more fully developed in a text attributed to Khorenats'i.¹⁰⁷ According to this account, Hripsimē was of royal stock, descended from Patronice, the wife of the emperor Claudius. One of the several versions of the discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem attributes it not to Helena, but to Patronice.¹⁰⁸ A fragment of the Cross was thus handed down from Patronice to Hripsimē, who left the relic at Varag with two priests

¹⁰⁴ Pseudo-Yovhannes Mamikonian, 1993, p. 158. It should be noted that Vahan did leave the Cross in Tsitsarn – but he also gained control of the church, and of the relic, cut off the head of the thief, and imprisoned the prince of Arjk'; *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 225; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 317. Thomas has confused Nerses II with Nerses III. As Thomson notes in Artsruni, 1985, p. 317 n. 1, there is no earlier mention of this cross in the *History of the House of the Artsrunik*. Such errors, of which there are several, suggest that the single surviving manuscript is flawed. See also Artsruni, 1985, pp. 15, 360 n. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 306–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 369.

¹⁰⁷ According to Thomson, this section of the text is not by Khorenats'i and is of a later date; *idem*, 1986/94, p. 79; Frolow, 1961, pp. 212–13.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–8.

who had accompanied her on her journey from Rome. When Hripsimē and her companions were subsequently martyred by the Armenian king Trdat, the relic was forgotten until the time of Vard Rshtuni.¹⁰⁹ Patronice supplies the necessary imperial connection, fulfilling the role assigned to Heraklios in the other two legends discussed above, and thus supplies the relic with the necessary aura of authenticity. The legend thus neatly avoids any reference to the Byzantine empire or Constantinople, and any connection between the relic and the Byzantine Church.

I suggest that Thomas's reference to Vard the Patrician, though brief, is significant. The Rshtuni controlled the lands of Vaspurakan before their family was virtually decimated by the imprisonment and death of their leaders in Samarra – creating a power vacuum that was filled by the Artsrunik'. Vard's palace was in Ostan, on the shore opposite the island of Aght'amar, and as we have seen, a city rebuilt by Gagik.¹¹⁰ Rshtuni princes also erected buildings on Aght'amar, a fact played down by Thomas Artsruni's anonymous continuator: 'but all these lived as in tents or fruiterers' huts on that famous island Aght'amar up to the time of Gagik, the great king of Armenia'.¹¹¹ But Vard and Gagik were most closely linked by similar concerns for their pious reputations.

A tale first related by the eighth-century historian Ghewond is more fully elaborated by Pseudo-Shapuh. When Armenia was partitioned between Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire, Vard Rshtuni agreed to help the Byzantine army cross a bridge over the River Gayl. He then betrayed these plans to the Sasanians, who set an ambush for the Byzantine soldiers. After the Byzantine troops crossed the bridge, Vard destroyed it. Their retreat cut off, some 30,000 men were massacred by the waiting Sasanian army. Stunned by the results of his treason, Vard dreamed he was drowning in a sea of blood, weighed down by heavy chains. He awoke and confessed his sins to a bishop, who consulted a hermit as to the correct penance. The hermit, Simeon, told Vard that he must spend his wealth on the construction of churches dedicated to St Stephen the Protomartyr. Vard eagerly carried out his penance, regretting only that he did not have relics of the Protomartyr with which to embellish his foundations. Simeon journeyed to Jerusalem and served in the monastery of St Stephen. After three years, the Protomartyr appeared in a dream to a sacristan of the monastery and instructed that 'a portion of his bones' should be given to Simeon. When the relics were brought to Armenia and used to bless Vard's pious constructions, he had another dream. In this dream he saw himself rescued from the sea of blood by Simeon and one thousand priests, who then bathed and crowned him and dressed him in white robes. On awaking, Vard donned a hair shirt and gave all his possessions to the poor.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ The text indicates that when the princess Beryl took the relic, the wooden fragments were enclosed in a 'golden covering' of unspecified form and origin. The Cross relics of Hats'iun and any reliquary that once held them have vanished. There is no surviving mention of any subsequent reliquaries.

¹¹⁰ Artsruni, 1991, p. 255; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 318.

¹¹¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 293; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 355.

¹¹² Thomson, 1988/89, pp. 199–201; Ghewond, 1982, ch. 4; also discussed in Thompson, 1986/94, esp. 77–80.

The parallels between Vard and Gagik are striking – to a point. Vard, eager to advance his own status, betrayed his stated allegiances and initiated a massacre of Christians at the hands of non-Christians. Gagik, ambitious for royal status, collaborated with the ostikan against the Bagratuni army and initiated actions that resulted in Armenian deaths, including that of his uncle and former king. It may be suggested that Vard provided Gagik with a model of penitence. We have seen above that Gagik's penitence and wish for salvation is given prominent visual expression in the interior and exterior decorative programme of his palatine church. The same message is conveyed in his repeated acts of patronage which refer to the holy sites of Jerusalem. These include the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sion at Van, the iconography and placement of painted scenes in Gagik's palace church, and the illuminated manuscript given to the monastery of the Holy Cross at Varag. Vard, as part of his penitence, sought relics from Jerusalem. Gagik, when faced with his sins, sought to associate himself with relics from the Holy City. But the parallels between Vard and Gagik extend only so far. While Vard subsequently embraced a life of poverty, it is clear that Gagik had no such intention.

The relic of the True Cross of Varag, on which Gagik lavished gold, precious gems and pearls, gave visual expression to his piety, invoking Christ and Jerusalem. Certainly, the Armenians who viewed this relic were well versed in the histories of Ghewond and others, and would see in Gagik's patronage of the Cross at Varag a reference to Vard the Patrician and his presumably successful repentance of sins. However, *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'* conveys a very different message. Here the Cross of Varag functions primarily as an expression of Gagik's legitimate royal status. This is evident in Thomas's characterization of the relic: 'in which the ranks of kings who believe in Christ glory and by which they are crowned'.¹¹³ In the written text, the relic of the True Cross at Varag thus proclaims Gagik's royal status as equal to that of the Bagratuni kings, and situates him within the larger family of Christian rulers.

And what of the reliquary ordered by Gagik to house this relic? Thomas provides a detailed description: Gagik 'covered the holy cross of salvation with gold studded with precious stones, and set the wondrous rood with pearls; he fitted it into sweet-smelling wood, leaving a part open from the golden covering, and on its front [fitted] a square cross-shaped wooden casket'.¹¹⁴ There are no surviving Armenian reliquaries that date to the Bagratuni period, and Thomas Artsruni's passage is one of only two surviving descriptions of reliquaries that are lost to us. The other, although lacking in detail, also describes a reliquary commissioned for the relic of the True Cross at Varag. According to Matthew of Edessa, Gagik's reliquary was replaced by the Bagratuni king Ashot IV (1017–1040). Ashot, embroiled in a war of succession with his brother, allied himself with king Senek'erim of

¹¹³ Artsruni, 1991, p. 254; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 317.

¹¹⁴ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 254–55; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 317. The expensive materials stand in contrast to the silver with which Gagik refitted the cross at Ostan.

Vaspurakan and sought divine assistance from the Cross of Varag. He made a donation 'from the gold of the Arabs, which he had brought from the city of Baghdad and which had been given him by the caliph', and ordered a new reliquary made for True Cross, decorated with 'precious stones and pearls'.¹¹⁵

At first glance, the description of the reliquaries commissioned by Gagik Artsruni and Ashot IV invokes contemporary Byzantine *staurotheke*, reliquaries made specifically to house fragments of the True Cross.¹¹⁶ However, there is one significant difference between the Armenian reliquaries and Byzantine *staurotheke*: the latter are all decorated with figural imagery or a combination of images and text. Many Byzantine *staurotheke* employ cloisonné enamels, but smaller, less costly reliquaries of bronze and stone also feature carved images.¹¹⁷ An example of the type of reliquary presented by the imperial court to foreign dignitaries is the Byzantine *staurotheke* preserved in the monastery of Martvili, Georgia. It is a small pectoral cross embellished with pearls and precious stones. Enamelled depictions of the Crucifixion with the Virgin, St John and the archangels Michael and Gabriel decorate the front. The reverse features an enamel image of the Virgin Hodegetria.¹¹⁸

In contrast, the descriptions of the reliquaries commissioned for the Cross of Varag by Gagik Artsruni and Ashot IV do not mention figural imagery. It may be suggested that these new containers, regardless of whether they featured figural imagery, not only attested to the piety and power of their donors, but also strengthened and renewed the relics' visual expression of national identity, and thus matched the identity promoted by the textual tradition.¹¹⁹ Each refurbishment of the Cross at Varag would further link the Cross relic with Armenia and the Armenian Church, and further distance it from Byzantium.¹²⁰

The final relic to be considered brings us full circle, to a fragment of the Cross and a Bagratuni king of Armenia. As previously discussed, Ashot IV and his brother Yovhannēs-Smbat fought a war of succession, with Yovhannēs-Smbat ultimately receiving the title king of Ani and the

¹¹⁵ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, pp. 22–3.

¹¹⁶ These containers can take many forms; they are defined by their common function. The most recent discussion of Byzantine *staurotheke*, with bibliography, is to be found in Evans and Wixom, 1997, pp. 161–83.

¹¹⁷ For the prestige of Byzantine enamel work in the Western medieval world, see Voelke, 1980. Georgian reliquaries decorated with enamelled scenes also suggest that this medium was closely identified with Byzantium. See, for example, the fragmentary remains of the eleventh-century Byzantine reliquary known as the Khakuli reliquary; Frolow, 1965, p. 70, fig. 30; and for the so-called Dagmar Cross, Evans and Wixom, 1997, p. 498. For Georgian enamels in general, see Amiranashvili, 1971. An examination of the role of Byzantine relics of the True Cross as conveyors of medieval identity is forthcoming from the author. For a study of secular Georgian enamelwork, see Redford, 1990, pp. 119–35.

¹¹⁸ In the late ninth or early tenth century, an imperial envoy presented the metropolitan of Martvili, a member of the Georgian branch of the Bagratid family, with a fragment of the Cross enclosed in a Byzantine-produced reliquary; Frolow, 1961, p. 228; Frolow, 1965, p. 164.

¹¹⁹ Thomson, 1988/89, p. 189.

¹²⁰ Support for interpreting a lack of images on reliquaries to the connection between such images and Byzantium may be found in the absence of Armenian icons. Unless contrary evidence is discovered, it seems that medieval Armenia, ever sensitive to the prospect of absorption by her neighbour to the west, eschewed religious art that was closely identified with the Byzantine Church. The question of Armenian icons has been addressed by Der Nersessian, 1973, pp. 405–15. For icons in Cilician Armenia, see Carr, 1997, pp. 73–102.



5.3 South façade, Church of the Holy Saviour, Ani

surrounding district of Shirak.¹²¹ The Church of the Holy Saviour in Ani was constructed by Ablgharib Pahlavuni; its south façade retains three inscriptions that proclaim the circumstances of the church's patronage and dedication (Figure 5.3). The first, dated to 1035, states: 'I the *marzpan* Ablgharib, went to Michael [Michael IV], emperor of the Greeks in Constantinople, on orders from Smbat *shahanshah* and after many efforts and great expense I received a fragment of the True Cross.'¹²² The inscription continues, celebrating the Cross that is housed within the church in mystical terms. Another inscription, dated to 1036, reiterates Ablgharib's role as the founder of the Church of the Holy Saviour and gives his pedigree in full: 'son of prince Grigor, grandson of Apughamr, and brother of Vahram and Vasak'.¹²³ A second inscription of the same date names the catholicos Peter, and records his largesse. Another, dated to 1040, tells us of further donations by Ablgharib to the church.¹²⁴

What is interesting is that while we have multiple inscriptions recounting the generosity of the elite of Ani, only once do we find the name of the king. The inscription naming Yovhannēs-Smbat also contains the only mention of Byzantium and the relic of the True Cross. The text clearly frames the acquisition of the Cross relic as an act between two royals: the emperor and the *shahanshah*. Here, it may be suggested, we find a response to Gagik IV's patronage of the Cross of Varag and to the fraternal war of succession and the lingering questions it raised. Yovhannes-Smbat, like his predecessors Ashot I and Gagik II, used the 'gift' of a fragment of the Cross to underscore his legitimacy. In the inscription, the emphasis of the Byzantine provenance of the fragment demonstrated Byzantium's acknowledgement of Yovhannēs-Smbat's royal status and proclaimed his place in the wider Christian *oikumene*.

Construction of cities

City-building, including the construction of palaces, gave visual testimony to power and authority. Cities offered proof of permanence, and their well-fortified aspect underscored a ruler's military prowess, visually expressing his ability to protect and provide for those dependent upon him.¹²⁵ When we attempt to analyse the secular constructions of Armenian kings, we are faced with an almost complete lack of evidence. With the single exception of the *History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, no surviving contemporary Armenian text provides descriptions of royal residences. Palaces constructed by medieval Armenian kings and noblemen have either vanished entirely or

¹²¹ Matthew of Edessa, 1993, pp. 66–7; Aristakēs Lastivert, 1973 (writing in 1072–87), pp. 9–10.

¹²² Translated from Uluhogian, 2001, pp. 23–39. My translation corrects the date of 484 to equal 1035, not 1045 as in Uluhogian.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

¹²⁵ See Chapter 1 above, and Thomas Artsruni's comments on the duties of princes and kings; Artsruni, 1991, 253–6; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 316–17; these are echoed by the anonymous continuator; Artsruni, 1991, p. 292; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 353.

survive as poorly excavated ruins that are difficult to interpret.¹²⁶ Ani presents a particularly muddled picture due to the shifts of occupation and domination that occurred there after the fall of the last Bagratuni king.¹²⁷ One excavated site that is relatively well-preserved is the tenth- or eleventh-century fortress of Amberd, the seat of the Pahlawuni. This family was prominent at the Bagratuni court; its members include the Gregory Magistros discussed above. The palace at Amberd was originally three storeys high and rectangular in shape, with five or more rooms arranged in a single row on each floor.¹²⁸ This single edifice does not provide us with enough evidence to comment on Bagratuni palaces.

While there is a lack of surviving evidence of Bagratuni palace and city constructions and a dearth of any textual descriptions of lost Bagratuni buildings, the *History of the House of the Artsrunik'* contains comparatively detailed descriptions of the secular constructions of Gagik Artsruni. During the years 904–20, Gagik built or rebuilt several cities. Of these constructions, only the church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar remains, but the details provided by Thomas Artsruni and the anonymous continuator allow us to identify the characteristic features of the cities which no longer survive.

Both Thomas Artsruni and the continuator indicate that the Artsrunik' family possessed a winter palace near Marakan, to the northeast of Lake Van, near the intersection of the Araxes and Karmir rivers. It was while Gagik's father, Derenik, was en route to Marakan that he was ambushed and killed in 887.¹²⁹ This may be the same residence which, according to Thomas, Gagik embellished with fortified walls, dwellings and streets. Gagik also built, either at Marakan or near to it, a palace which was 'beautifully adorned for festivities'.¹³⁰

In other, more detailed accounts of Gagik's constructions, the Artsrunik' historians emphasize specific architectural elements, and document the repeated use of these elements in successive constructions. Thomas Artsruni relates that in 904, when Gagik was made prince of Vaspurakan following the death of his elder brother, he refurbished and made additions to his father's palace situated high on the rock of Van. Among the additions were two

¹²⁶ Baboukhian, 1984, pp. 47–55, gives a brief review of existing Armenian palaces. An even briefer account is given by Halpahcjan, 1978, pp. 215–16. A comparative discussion and bibliography of Armenian palaces dating from the fourth through the seventh centuries is given by Haroutunian, 1990, pp. 185–93. The extant fortress at modern Doğubeyazit (Armenian Daroynk') was the site of the family sepulchre of the Bagratuni, and may also have been their primary residence until the mid-eighth century; see Edwards, 1984, pp. 437, 444. Gagik Artsruni captured Daroynk' in 921–22, and may then have initiated limited reconstruction; he is known to have used the fortress as a military outpost until 936–43. No evidence of any palatial residence remains; see *ibid.*, p. 437; also Artsruni, 1991, pp. 286, 302; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 348, 364; the latter refers to the use of the fortress to house Muslim prisoners of war. Draskhanakertsi' mentions Daroynk' only in connection with burials in the Bagratuni sepulchre; Draskhanakertsi', 1987, pp. 97, 102, 170, 254 n. 25, 292 n. 8, 316. The patriarchal palace at Duin, first built in the fifth century and rebuilt in the seventh century, has been well studied, but as it had special, if not unique requirements, it has not been included in this consideration. It should nevertheless be stated that it does not offer any similarities with Islamic palaces or with the palace on Aght'amar. A recent discussion with bibliography is Kalantarian, 1990, pp. 215–21.

¹²⁷ Cuneo and Alpagò-Novello, 1984, p. 87.

¹²⁸ Tokarskij and Alpagò-Novello, 1972, pp. 6–8, 13.

¹²⁹ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 226–7; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 289–90.

¹³⁰ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 254, 264; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 316, 327.

banqueting halls which were decorated with gold and which featured 'verandas', or viewing balconies.¹³¹ While a prince, Gagik fortified the city walls of Ostan; after he was granted the title of king, he added a palace. The textual description of this palace indicates the presence of an elevated platform: 'on top of the wall, facing the sea, he built a pavilion for gatherings which was decorated with gold and various colours, so that it glittered like the rays of the sun'.¹³² The walls at Ostan also featured gates 'in the form of vaults to provide air and refreshing shade'. The description of their form and function suggests these gates were *iwans*, vaulted structures with one or more open sides which provided shelter while allowing for the circulation of air. In 913–14, following the death of his uncle, the Bagratuni king Smbat, Gagik began construction on the new city of Aght'amar. Amidst the multiple splendours of the city were platforms built high atop the city wall, where 'the king often took his ease with his sons and noble courtiers'.¹³³

Three of the major construction projects undertaken by Gagik as prince and king feature elevated platforms and/or open-sided pavilions; such structures are integral components of Islamic palace architecture. The elevated platform was built for the enjoyment of a view and for the reception of guests. While it did, to some limited extent, also visually transmit the exalted status of the ruler, the view *seen by* the ruler was privileged over the view *of* the ruler.¹³⁴ *Iwans* are also found in Islamic palaces, and like elevated platforms, *iwans* were often used for the reception of guests and the enjoyment of a view.¹³⁵

These descriptions of elevated platforms and *iwans* at Van, Ostan and Aght'amar demonstrate the systematic use in Vaspurakan of formal elements characteristic of Abbasid royal complexes.¹³⁶ For Gagik Artsruni, one further emulation of Abbasid royal ideology may be suggested. The descriptions of Gagik's city-building are presented chronologically in *The History of the House of the Artsrunik'*, becoming more detailed as Gagik's power increases, and culminating in the two chapters devoted to the construction of his palace and palace church on the island of Aght'amar. This textual emphasis on successive constructions, each more splendid than the one before, certainly reflects Gagik's burgeoning status and the consolidation of his power. Such presentation is also a standard literary *topos*, found in many medieval

¹³¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 253; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 316.

¹³² Artsruni, 1991, p. 292; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 354.

¹³³ Artsruni, 1991, p. 294; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 356.

¹³⁴ The origin of elevated platforms, called *miradors* in their Spanish Umayyad context, is not known; they are found in Sasanian palaces, and were later transmitted from Umayyad and Abbasid palaces to those constructed by Fatimid and Spanish Umayyad rulers. The summer palace of the wife of the Sasanian ruler Khusraw II (560–628) featured two viewing platforms; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. 'Kasr-i-Shirin'. For the palace of al-Mutasim in Samarra, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. 'Bustan'; for the Balkuwara and the Istabulat at Samarra, see Creswell, 1940, pp. 232–43, 265–70; for the Jawsaq al-Khaqani at Samarra, see Herzfeld, 1948. For Fatimid *miradors*, see Behrens-Abouseif, 1992, pp. 304–7. For Spanish Umayyad examples, see Ruggles, 1990; idem, 2000.

¹³⁵ *Iwans*, like elevated platforms, are found in Sasanian constructions; see Bier, 1986. For the presence of *iwans* in the palace of al-Mutasim at Samarra, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. 'Bustan'.

¹³⁶ Another similarity with Islamic palace architecture is suggested by the description of Gagik's royal palace on the island of Aght'amar. According to the anonymous continuator, the palace was 'forty cubits wide and deep and equally high', with an unsupported vault which 'took the form of a bird in flight'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 295; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 357. The square plan and steep, curving vault recall the Abbasid palaces of Samarra and the so-called desert palace of Ukhaydir; Hoag, 1987, p. 46.

cultures, where the presentation of increasingly magnificent royal deeds reflects the increasing power of a ruler. The presentation of Gagik's building projects in his family history certainly reflects this *topos*; it may also reflect Islamic courtly ideology.

One way in which Abbasid caliphs gave visual expression to their power was through the construction of new cities. This is particularly evident in the palaces which comprise the royal city of Samarra. Although it functioned as the capital for a relatively brief period (836–83) before the caliphate returned to Baghdad, the caliphs who ruled from Samarra built a succession of palaces which eventually stretched for over thirty miles along the banks of the Tigris.¹³⁷ The ideology expressed in these constructions is evident in a boast attributed to the caliph al-Mutawakkil, who alone built 19 palaces in Samarra. Upon completion of one of these, he is said to have declared: 'Now I know that I am a king for I have built myself a town and live in it.'¹³⁸ It will be remembered that it was al-Mutawakkil who imprisoned the Armenians in Samarra and feted them in his banquet hall upon their release. The language used by Thomas Artsruni to describe Gagik's additions to the palace at Van echoes the boast attributed to this caliph: 'thereby he provided for the various needs and requirements of his royal palace, his own construction *that was built like a city*, improving on the construction of his father'.¹³⁹ While Gagik's constructions may have been motivated by necessity rather than royal vanity, their presentation in the Artsrunik' history seems to reflect Abbasid courtly ideology.

¹³⁷ For the size and function of Islamic 'palaces' which were built on the scale of cities, see Ettinghausen and Grabar, 1994, pp. 82ff.

¹³⁸ Northedge, 2005, p. 272; Hoag, 1987, p. 50.

¹³⁹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 253; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 316; italics added. It is possible that we also find an echo of al-Mutawakkil's boast in the title of the chapter which describes the wonders of the new royal city of Aght'amar, 'Concerning the Building of Aght'amar and those who constructed there a few buildings unworthy of mention before the undertaking of the king'; Artsruni, 1991, p. 292; translated in Artsruni, p. 354.

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Conclusion: methods and meanings of transmission

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that Gagik Artsruni turned to Islam for many visual symbols of power, appropriating elements of Abbasid court architecture, iconography and ideology to express his authority and legitimacy. We have also seen that these appropriations were not inflexible, but were adapted to suit Gagik's specific requirements.

Why did Gagik turn to Islam? The choice of the Islamic paradigm can be partially ascribed to geography; the interaction, hostile and otherwise, with the neighbouring emirates is one possible venue of transmission. Vaspurakan, of all the principalities of medieval Armenia, was in closest proximity to the Arab emirates that were concentrated in the south and southwest of Armenia. We know that at least one family of emirs, the Zurarids, intermarried with the Artsrunik'.

The exposure of the Artsrunik' to the palaces of Samarra and Partaw must also have been highly influential. In terms of direct exposure to Abbasid courts or to the court of the ostikan, we have seen that Gagik's grandfather, father and uncle were among those imprisoned at Samarra,¹ and we have also seen the frequent interactions between Gagik, his brothers and Islamic officials. The three Artsrunik' brothers travelled together and separately to the ostikan's palace in Partaw, seeking support for the secession of Vaspurakan and the creation of an independent kingdom.² According to Thomas Artsruni and his anonymous continuator, Gurgēn, the youngest Artsruni brother, was kept hostage at Partaw for one year by the ostikan Afshin.³ As a youth, Gagik too was held hostage in Partaw; when grown, he was received there more hospitably by Afshin and his successor.⁴

While the exposure of the Artsrunik' family to the palaces of Samarra and Partaw was no doubt crucial to the transmission of Islamic court architecture and royal ideology, the seemingly endless streams of diplomatic gifts which the texts describe flowing between Baghdad and Vaspurakan must have been equally important in the transmission of Islamic courtly iconography. Gagik's father and grandfather were laden with gifts upon their release from Samarra.⁵ According to the catholicos, Ashot Artsruni was given 'praise-

¹ Artsruni, 1991, p. 202; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 265–6.

² Artsruni, 1991, pp. 233, 239, 273–4; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 296, 302, 336–7.

³ Artsruni, 1991, pp. 239–40, 274; translated in Artsruni, 1985, pp. 302, 337.

⁴ Artsruni, 1991, p. 274; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 337. According to the anonymous continuator, Gagik was the first of the brothers to be held hostage by Afshin; after seven months, Ashot Artsruni sent his youngest brother Gurgēn to Partaw, achieving Gagik's release. Gagik's imprisonment is not mentioned by Thomas.

⁵ Artsruni, 1991, p. 202; translated in Artsruni, 1985, p. 265. The seminal volume on gift-giving remains Marcel Mauss, 1990. For a recent debate on Mauss's work, see Algazi, Groebner and Jussen, ed., 2002.

worthy ornaments' when he visited the ostikan's palace.⁶ As we have seen, Gagik was frequently on the receiving end of this gift-giving, being the recipient of at least six crowns and four royal robes in addition to other luxury goods.

Yet this contact and interchange was not unique to the Artsrunik'. Similar evidence can also be marshalled to illustrate regular contact between the Bagratuni, the court at Baghdad, and that of the ostikan. Like the Artsrunik', the Bagratuni intermarried with the local emirs – but their alliances were higher in the power structure. Smbat I's niece, for example, was married, however reluctantly, to the ostikan Afshin.⁷ Like the Artsrunik', the Bagratuni were unwilling guests in the caliphal prisons of Samarra. The catholicos tells us that Smbat I was also invited to Baghdad as a guest of the caliph. While he does not reveal whether the visit actually occurred, neither does he indicate that the invitation was itself extraordinary.⁸ The texts also document visits by members of the Bagratuni family to the ostikan in Partaw.⁹

The contemporary texts also suggest that, in purely quantitative terms, more gifts passed from the caliph and the ostikan to members of the Bagratuni family than were presented to the Artsrunik'. As was befitting the royal status of the Bagratuni, these gifts were not only more numerous, they were more precious in terms of the materials used, and there was also a longer tradition of such gifts. Given this evidence of sustained interactions and exchanges between Bagratuni and the highest Islamic authorities, why, then, do we not find the same appropriation and incorporation of Islamic expressions of power in the surviving descriptions or examples of tenth-century Bagratuni art and architecture, as is present in the art and architecture of Vaspurakan?

It has been demonstrated that the primary symbolism of the Bagratuni investiture ceremonial was one of pious rulership. I suggest that the spiritual prestige enjoyed by the Bagratuni, symbolized by the Armenian investiture which only they enjoyed, was the source from which they drew their temporal authority. Such emphasis on their pious reputation would, in turn, de-emphasize the visual expression of any message not directly associated with piety, and would consequently limit, if not exclude completely, the use of Islamic elements. While the evidence is scarce, it has been demonstrated above that the existing Bagratuni comparanda do suggest such an avoidance of Islamic-influenced art and architecture.

If we accept that there was already in existence an established method of visually characterizing Armenian rulership in the form of Bagratuni ceremonial and royal imagery, we must then ask why Gagik Artsruni did not emulate the Bagratuni model.¹⁰ I suggest that, simply put, Gagik could not compete with the Bagratuni on the issue of piety. In addition to the conversion

⁶ Draskhanakerttsi', 1987, p. 144.

⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

⁹ See above, Chapter 2.

¹⁰ An awareness of this model has been suggested above, provided by the figures of Old Testament kings carved on the exterior of the Church of the Holy Cross, each of which wears a turban as a symbol of royal status.

of Gagik's father and grandfather, his elder brother died an excommunicant, and of course Gagik was himself the decisive factor in the capture and resultant murder of Smbat I. There was, in contrast, no tarnish on the Bagratuni's pious reputation. The martyr's death of king Smbat, the subsequent miracles connected with his body, and his canonization all granted the Bagratuni a spiritual prestige *par excellence*. The Armenian investiture, in which the Bagratuni king was blessed and invested by the catholicos, added to their pious reputation. It was, quite literally, the crowning expression of Bagratuni piety. It was also an expression restricted to Bagratuni kings.

What Gagik did possess, and what the Bagratuni lacked, was secure temporal power. Gagik, when faced with a need for a visual expression of his power, was conceivably presented with two options: model his imagery on that of the Bagratuni kings, or assemble a new expression of rulership. Unable to compete with the Bagratuni on the issue of piety alone, I suggest that he sought to give visual expression to his strongest royal qualification: his temporal power. As demonstrated above, he found in Islam appropriate expressions of this power.

Was this Armenian use of Islamic court ideology, art and architecture new, or did it pre-date Gagik's rise to power? No textual or physical evidence survives to answer this question. The geographical proximity of Vaspurakan to Islamic lands and to the emirates settled in southern Armenia, and the documented intermarriages and interactions between the Artsrunik', Islamic officials and emirates strongly suggest that the features of Islamic court art and architecture which have been proposed as the primary expressions of Gagik's royal power had been assimilated into southern Armenia prior to Gagik's rise to power. Gagik's use of Islamic architectural elements certainly supports this suggestion. As we have seen, Thomas Artsruni documents the multiple incorporation of elevated platforms and *iwans* into Gagik's constructions following his elder brother's death in 904. It is highly unlikely that previously unknown elements would have found such immediate and repeated use. This, I suggest, supports the conclusion that these and other features which originated in Islam had already become part of the southern Armenian architectural *lingua franca*.

What was original, I propose, was the use of Islamic-appropriated elements by Gagik as vehicles for the expression of legitimate Armenian kingship. Denied the dual investiture of Bagratuni kings, I suggest that Gagik Artsruni sought other methods by which to express the duality of his rule. His secular power, undeniably his strongest royal qualification, was powerfully conveyed by Islamic court iconography and ideology. Equally important, such royal presentations would be unchallenged by any similar expression of Bagratuni rulership.

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Index

- Abbasid caliphate 2, 15n. (12), 17, 33, 106, 123; *see also* Moqtadir, al-; Mutawakkil, al-
- Afshin b. Abu l'-Sadj (d. 901), ostikan 8n. (37), 20, 24, 26n. (74), 65, 125-6
- Aght'amar, island of Church of the Holy Cross 1, 46, 97, 102n. (41), 104, 107, 111n. (85)
- exterior decorative program 54, 83, 87-9, 91-5
- narrative scenes 80, 87, 89, 91, 92-4
- presentation of Gagik Artsruni 51, 57-65, 78-83
- saints and martyrs 83-7, 89-91, 94
- interior decorative program 57, 67
- Christological cycle 67-70
- Genesis cycle 67, 72-4
- presentation of Gagik Artsruni 69-70, 71, 74-8
- royal view 70-71, 75-7
- construction on 4, 10, 105, 121-3
- palace 53-4, 65
- pre-Artsrunik' constructions on 116; *see also* Vard the Patrician
- Albania 2n. (4), 15
- Ani
- churches in 43-5, 98-9, 107, 120
- Church of the Holy Saviour
- reliquaries of 117-18
- city of 1, 3n. (5), 4, 19n. (28), 31, 34, 51, 121
- palace, palace church 57n. (11)
- anonymous continuator 5, 22n. (51), 23, 24, 25-6, 29, 32, 41n. (24), 53, 65n. (27), 89, 99, 100, 105, 106, 107, 109, 115-16, 120n. (125), 121, 122n. (136), 125; *see also* Artsruni, Thomas; Catholicos, John
- Archōn ton archontōn* 3, 21, 27, 30, 37, 38
- Armenia
- good rulership in 8-11
- political organization of 1-3, 39n. (20)
- religious differences with Byzantium, Georgia 24, 27, 85-7
- restoration of monarchy to 16, 18, 33
- Arsacid 1, 16, 19n. (30), 23n. (59), 32, 37-9, 84, 106
- Artsruni, Ashot (grandfather of Gagik Artsruni) 5, 14
- Artsruni, Ashot, Prince of Vaspurakan (brother of Gagik Artsruni) 23-5, 100, 125
- excommunication of 9n. (45), 65, 67, 127
- Artsruni, Derenik, Prince of Vaspurakan (father of Gagik Artsruni) 5, 9-10, 14, 22, 121
- Artsruni, Derenik, King of Vaspurakan (son of Gagik Artsruni) 4
- Artsruni, Gagik, King of Vaspurakan 3-5, 8, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30-31, 33, 41n. (24), 45n. (39), 46, 64, 88-9, 95, 110, 125
- collusion with ostikan 25, 65, 125
- constructions by 53, 65-8, 99-103, 105-6, 121-3, 127
- co-rule with Gurgēn 8, 41n. (24)
- pious deeds of 107-9, 114, 117-18
- pious reputation of 9-11, 57, 67, 80-82, 83, 87, 91, 95, 103, 105-6, 109, 115-17, 126-7
- recognition by Bagratuni 23-4
- recognition by Byzantium 3, 30
- recognition by Caliphate 3, 16n. (13), 25-6, 28n. (85), 29-30, 32, 61, 125-6; *see also* Aght'amar; Artsruni, Thomas; Bagratuni, Ashot I; Bagratuni, Smbat I; Jerusalem; manuscripts, Gospel of Queen Mlk'e; Ostan; True Cross; relics; reliquaries; Van
- Artsruni, Gagik Apupelch 5-6, 14, 23n. (55)
- Artsruni, Gurgēn *marzpan* (brother of Gagik Artsruni) 8-9, 22-3, 25, 41n. (24), 100, 104, 105, 107, 125n. (4)
- Artsruni, Sop'i 22
- Artsruni, Thomas (T'ovmay), author
- differs from history of John Catholicos 17n. (20), 25
- glorification of Artsrunik' 4-5, 8-9, 19n. (30), 41n. (24), 65n. (27), 85, 104-5

- witness of events 37, 125n. (4)
- Artsrunik'
 alliance with Bagratuni 24, 31, 65–6
 alliance with caliphate 25, 66–7, 104, 125, 127
 Bagratuni recognition of 22–3
 Byzantine recognition of 3, 30
 caliphate recognition of 13–14, 25–6, 28n. (85), 29, 32, 66
 claim of conversion 85
 intermarriage with Arabs 7, 125
 intermarriage with Bagratuni 22, 23n. (56)
see also under individual names;
 Aght'amar; manuscripts; True Cross;
 Van, Vaspurakan
- Ashot Kuhki (r. 891–918), 45–6, 82n. (67)
- Avarayr, battle of *see* Mamikonian
- Baghdad 54, 66, 105–6, 118, 125–6
- Bagrationi 21n. (44), 39, 51; *see also* Osk Vank; Ashot Kuhki
- Bagratuni
 anointment of 32–4
 Byzantine annexation of lands 3n. (5), 4
 Byzantine recognition of 21, 30, 37n. (8)
 caliphate recognition of 15, 18–19, 30, 125–6
 claim of conversion 85
 claim of Davidic descent 32–3
 double investiture of 18–20, 24, 27–8, 33
 intermarriage with Arabs 7, 126
 partition of rule in Armenia 3, 4, 24–8, 33
 pious reputation of 16–17, 30–31, 67, 126–
see also under individual names;
 manuscripts; True Cross
- Bagratuni, Ashot I, King of Armenia (r. 884/85–890) 2n. (3), 3, 7, 8, 10, 14–19, 21–3, 37–9, 41n. (22), 97, 112–14, 118
- Bagratuni, Ashot II, King of Armenia (r. 918–?928) 11, 19n. (28), 20–21, 22n. (50), 26–9, 30, 31, 32, 33n. (109), 34, 38, 67, 97–8
- Bagratuni, Ashot III King of Armenia (r. 952/53–977) 31–3, 98; *see also* Haghbat, Sanahin
- Bagratuni, Ashot IV, King 'of all the country outside Ani' 33–4
- Bagratuni, Ashot sparapet (the anti-king) 27–8, 98–9
- Bagratuni, Gagik I King of Armenia (r. 998/90–1017/1020) 33, 43–5, 46n. (45), 98–9
- Bagratuni, Gagik II, King of Ani (r. 1041–1045) 4, 34, 113–14
- Bagratuni, Gagik-Abas, King of Kars (r. 1029–1064) 48–51, 109–11; *see also* manuscripts, Gospel of Gagik-Abas
- Bagratuni, Goranduxt, (wife of Gagik-Abas) 48–51
- Bagratuni, Gurgēn, King of Tashir-Dzoraget (r. 980–?) 3n. (6), 33, 42–3
- Bagratuni, Katrimide (wife of Gagik I) 98, 107
- Bagratuni, Khrosvanush (wife of Ashot III) 41, 98; *see also* Haghbat, Sanahin
- Bagratauni, Marem, (daughter of Gagik-Abas) 48–51
- Bagratuni, Musegh, King of Kars and Vanand (c. 961), 3n. (6), 33, 41
- Bagratuni, Smbat I, King of Armenia, (r. c.890–914) 7–8, 18–20, 23–5, 30–31, 32, 97, 106–7, 126–7
 death of 26, 65–7, 104, 127
 sainthood, posthumous signs of 30n. (95), 127
- Bagratuni, Smbat II, King of Armenia, (r. 977–89) 33, 35–7, 41–3, 46, 98
- Bagratuni, Smbat *sparapet* (the Confessor) 5, 14, 17
- Bagratuni, Yovhannēs-Smbat, King of Ani (r. ?1022–1041) 33–4, 118–20; *see also* Ani, Church of the Holy Saviour; True Cross
- Basil I, Emperor (r. 867–886) 21, 29n. (88), 37–9
- Basil II, Emperor (r. 976–1025) 4, 39–40n. (20)
- Bugha 5–7, 13–15, 17
- Byzantium 2–4, 16, 19, 21n. (42), 23, 34, 35n. (1), 38, 43, 45n. (44), 51, 63, 70–71, 85, 87, 101n. (29), 111, 114, 118, 120; *see also* Basil I; Basil II; Leo VI; Constantine VII; Constantinople
- Catholicos, John (897/98–924/25)
 investitures of Bagratuni 18, 28–9, 30–32, 33–4, 37, 127
 role in society of 19–20, 46, 65–6, 97; *see also* Artsruni, Ashot, Prince of Vaspurakan, excommunication of; Artsruni, Thomas
- Catholicos, residences of 4, 7, 31, 121n. (126)
- Cilicia 4, 49, 50n. (61), 51, 118n. (120)
- Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus,

- Emperor (r. 905–59) 3, 21n. (41), 27, 30n. (93), 32, 38, 61n. (16), 112n. (89)
 Constantinople 6, 19, 21n. (42), 27, 34, 38, 45, 57, 66–7, 98, 101, 109–13, 116, 120
- Draskhanakerttsi', John (Yovhannēs) *see* Catholicos, John
- Duin 2n. (4), 7, 27n. (81), 35n. (2), 66–7, 106, 111n. (85), 121n. (126)
- Gregory the Illuminator, Saint
 churches associated with 43–4, 98–9, 106–7, 111n. (85), 114
 image of 83–5
- Haghbat, Church of the Holy Sign (Surb Neshan) 41–6, 50–51, 82n. (67), 98; *see also* Sanahin
- Heraklios, Emperor (r. 610–64) 104, 112n. (89), 113–16; *see also* True Cross
- Holy Sepulchre, Church of 101–4, 112n. (89); *see also* Jerusalem; Van
- Hripsimē, St. 111n. (85), 114–16; *see also* relics; True Cross
- Jerusalem 46, 48, 101–5, 109, 111, 115–17; *see also* Artsruni, Gagik; Holy Sepulchre, church of; manuscripts, Gospel of Queen Mlk'e; True Cross
- Kars 1n. (2), 3, 33, 41, 48, 50–51, 98, 110–11; *see also* Bagratuni, Gagik-Abas, King of Kars; manuscripts, Gospel of Gagik-Abas; Bagratuni, Musegh
- Lake Van 1n. (2), 3, 53, 85, 100, 108n. (85); *see also* Artsruni, Gagik; True Cross; Van
- Leo VI, Emperor (r. 886–912) 7, 21, 66n. (33)
- Magistros, Gregory *see* Pahlawuni, Gregory
- Mamikonian 16–17, 106, 113
- Manazav 4, 101
- Manuscripts, Illuminated
 Armenian, general 39n. (20), 104n. (45)
 Byzantine, influence of 35n. (1), 110
 Gospel of Gagik-Abas, Jerusalem 2556 46–51, 109
 Gospel of Queen Mlk'e, San Lazzaro 1144 107–9, 117
- Manzikert *see* Manazav
- Moqtadir, -al, Caliph 49n. (37), 57–9
- Mutawakkil, -al, Caliph (r. 847–61) 5, 14, 123
- Nakhchavan 17n. (18), 24–5, 65–6
- Osk Vank 39, 46, 51, 82n. (67), 40; *see also* Bagrationi
- Ostan, 100, 107, 116, 117n. (114), 122
- Pahlawuni, Gregory 34, 110, 121
- Partaw 2, 7, 18n. (25), 20, 25, 28, 29n. (89), 125–6
- regalia 18, 21, 28, 29n. (88), 37–9, 46, 51, 61, 63
 Crown(s) 13, 18–21, 22n. (47), 25–30, 31n. (100), 32n. (104), 33, 35n. (1), 37–9, 41, 43n. (34), 46, 57, 59, 61, 66, 70, 71, 82, 117, 126–7
 Robe(s) 15, 18–21, 26–30, 33, 46, 51, 61, 87, 94, 117, 126
- relics 85, 102, 111–20; *see also* reliquaries; True Cross
- reliquaries 111–14, 116n. (109), 117–18; *see also* relics; True Cross
- Rsh tunik' *see* Vard the Patrician
- Samarra 5, 14–17, 54, 67, 102, 116, 122–3, 125–6
- Sanahin, Church of the Holy Saviour (Amenap'rkits) 35–41, 46, 82n. (67), 98; *see also* Haghbat
- Sayf al-Dawla, Hamdanid emir 6, 63n. (22, 24)
- Seljuks 4, 50–51
- Shahanshah *see* Bagratuni, caliphal recognition of
- Siunik' 3–4, 22, 25, 27n. (84), 31n. (97), 33, 35n. (3), 43n. (34), 65, 70n. (41) 97–8, 99n. (17), 113–14
- Tarōn 3–4, 7, 10, 39–40, 111n. (85), 112, 114; *see also* relics; True Cross
- True Cross
 relic of 85, 102, 104, 111–20; *see also* Heraklios; Reliquaries; Tarōn; Tsitsarn; Varag, Mt.
- Tsitsarn 113, 115
- Van 75n. (54), 100–105, 117, 121, 123; *see also* Artsruni, Gagik; Jerusalem; Lake Van; True Cross
- Varag, Mt.
 sacred constructions on 84, 100, 107, 111n. (85), 114

- True Cross of 102, 111n. (85) 114–18, 120
see also Gregory the Illuminator;
 manuscripts, Gospel of Queen Mlk'e
- Vard the Patrician 100, 114–17
- Vaspurakan 3–8, 13–14, 22–5, 27–9, 30n.
 (93), 31, 33, 53, 65–6, 74, 83–7, 99, 102,
 104, 108n. (85), 113–16, 121–2, 125–7
- Yamanik (Muhammad al-Yamani)
 ostikan 7
- Yusuf b. Abu' l-Sadj (901–28/29), ostikan
 15n. (10), 20–21, 24–31, 33, 65–7, 104